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Exciting Mysteries
DETECTIVE
FICTION WEEKLY
FORMERLY FLYNN'S

PRISON BAIT

A Real Fighter Tackles The Perfect Frame-Up!

By Leslie White

•

MAX BRAND
PAUL ERNST
JOHN KOBLER
and others

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AMAZING
Facts for MEN

Nervous Debility, Frequent Night Rising, Leg Pains, Lame Back, Lumbago, Sexual Weakness, Kidney and Bladder Trouble, Chronic Constipation, Despondency, Restlessness at Night are only some of the ailments, differing in individuals, that can often be ascribed to lesion of the Prostate Gland.

THOUSANDS AFFLICTED

Thousands of men in every community suffer from these ailments, weaknesses and other physical shortcomings without knowing that very frequently they are caused by prostatic failure.

MANY DOCTORS ENDORSE MASSAGE

Massaging for the alleviation of Prostate Trouble is as old as time, and some of the most outstanding authorities in the medical profession recommend massage as a safe effective treatment. (See Reference Book of the Medical Sciences, Vol. VII, 3rd Edition.)

USE "PROSAGER"

—a new invention which enables any man to massage his Prostate Gland in the privacy of his home. It often brings relief with the first treatment and must help or it costs you nothing. No Drugs or Electricity.

Dr. W. D. Smith
INVENTOR

UNSOLICITED LETTERS OF GRATITUDE

The following are extracts from letters received, which are on file in our office; the complete letters and addresses will be sent to anyone who is interested in inquiring for them.

Mr. Wm. F. Lemon, San Francisco, California, writes: "After using the Prosager I am well again and feel none of the symptoms of Prostate Trouble." Mr. Wm. F. Lee, Washington, D. C., states in his letter: "The Prosager is mild, I would not be without it."

Mr. Henry Zitman, Auburn, Indiana, says: "I will say this much for the Prosager, it has saved me from an operation. The Doctor that treated me before I got it says it is a fine thing to use. If there is any one in this territory that wants to know about it, direct them to me." Mr. Judson Trefethan, New Castle, N. H., writes about the Prosager: "I think it is a great invention, my Doctor came to see it and he said it was a good invention."

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29x4.75-20	2.10	.95
29x5.00-19	2.25	1.05
30x5.00-20	2.40	1.05
5.25-17	2.45	1.15
28x5.25-18	2.45	1.15
29x5.25-19	2.45	1.15
30x5.25-20	2.50	1.15
31x5.25-21	2.80	1.15
5.50-17	2.75	1.15
28x5.50-18	2.75	1.15
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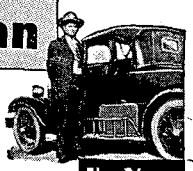

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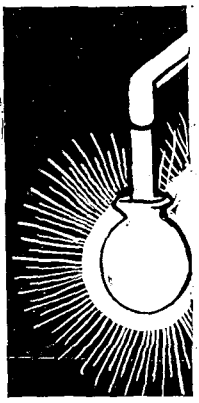

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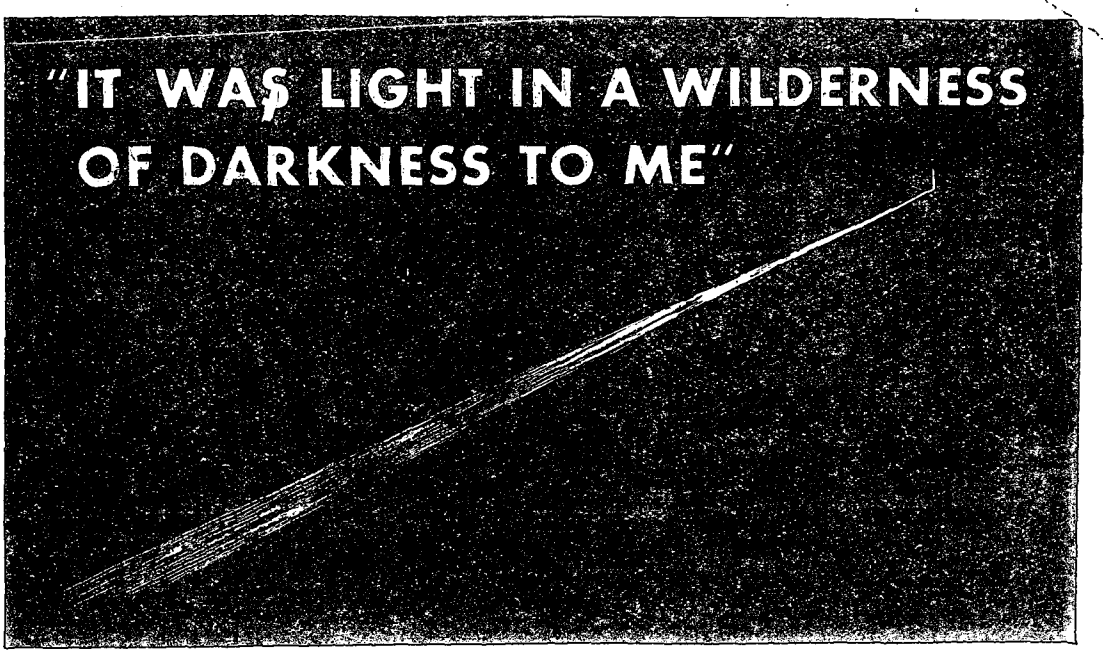

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DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

TITLE REGISTERED U. S. PATENT OFFICE

Formerly FLYNN'S

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The Magazine With the Detective Shield on the Cover Is On Sale Every Wednesday

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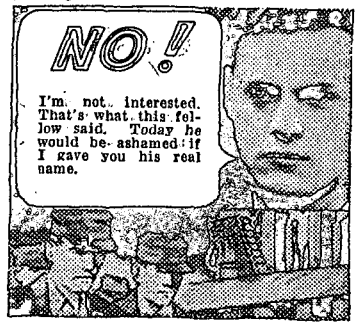
Read what happened to these two men when I said:



I will Train You at Home in Spare Time For a GOOD JOB IN RADIO

These two fellows had the same chance. Each clipped and sent me a coupon, like the one in this ad. They got my book on Radio's opportunities. S. J. Ebert, 104-B Quadrangle, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, that Radio offered him a real chance. He enrolled. The other fellow, whom we will call John Doe, wrote that he wasn't interested. He was just one of those fellows who wants a better job, better pay, but never does anything about it. One of the many who spend their lives in a low-pay, no-future job, because they haven't the ambition, the determination, the action it takes to succeed.

But read what S. J. Ebert wrote me and remember that John Doe had the same chance: "Upon graduation I accepted a job as serviceman, and within three weeks was made Service Manager. This job paid me $40 to $50 a week compared with $18 I earned in a shoe factory before. Eight months later I went with station KWCR as operator. From there I went to RTNT. Now I am Radio Engineer with WSUI. I certainly recommend the N. R. I. to all interested in the greatest field of all, Radio."

"I WANT TO HELP YOU. If you are earning less than $30 a week, I believe I can raise your pay. However, I will let you decide that. Let me show you what I have done for others, what I am prepared to do for you. Get my book, read it over; and decide one way or another."

J. E. Smith

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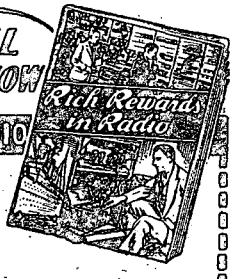
Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to anyone over 16 years old. It describes Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my Training for Radio and Television; shows you actual letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning; tells about my Money Back Agreement. MAIL THE COUPON in an envelope, or paste it on a penny postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute,
Dept. 6KK Washington, D. C.

MAIL THIS NOW



FOR FREE BOOK OF FACTS ABOUT RADIO

J. E. SMITH, President, National Radio Institute, Dept. 6KK, Washington, D. C.

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City ..... State .....

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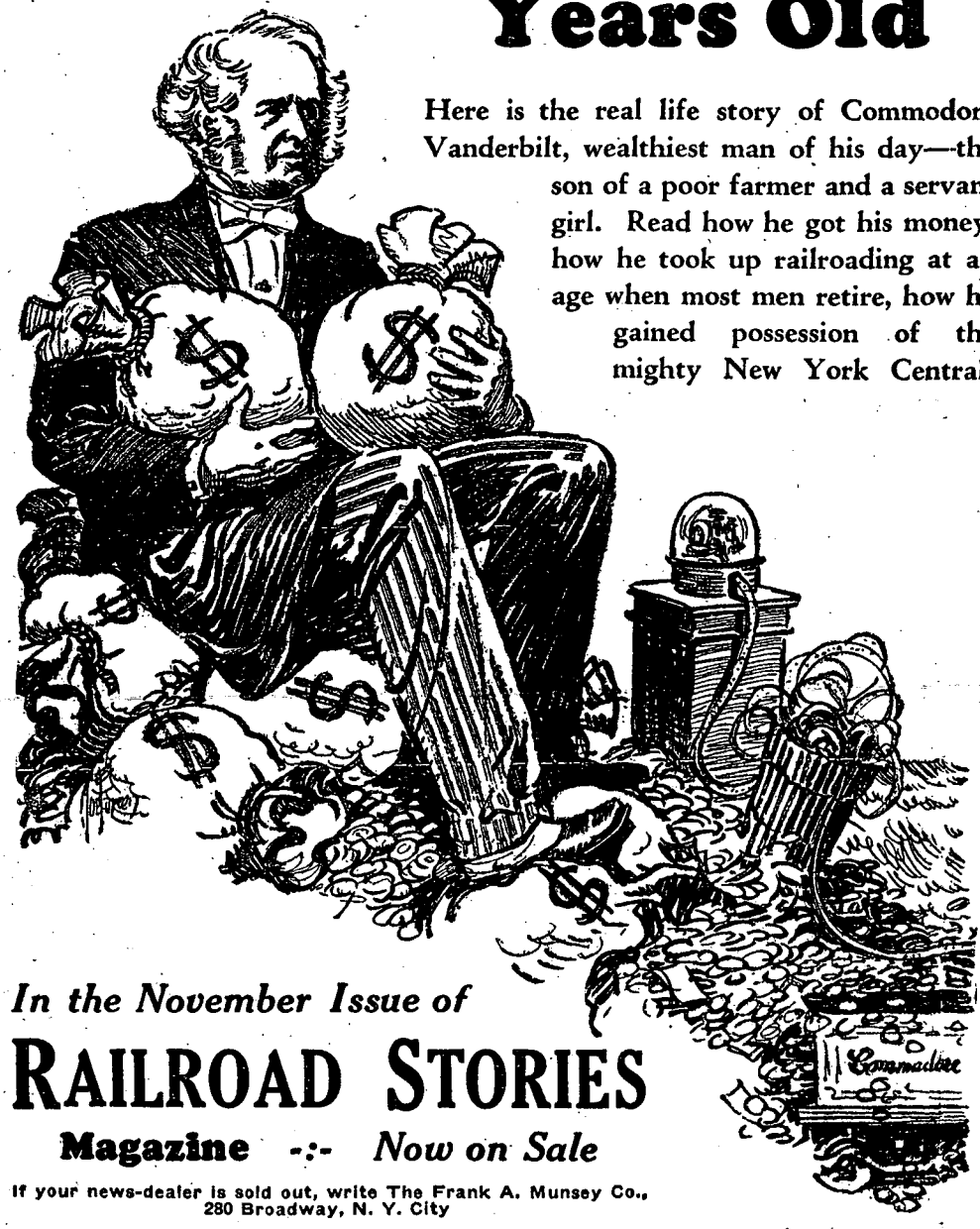

Here is the real life story of Commodore Vanderbilt, wealthiest man of his day—the son of a poor farmer and a servant girl. Read how he got his money, how he took up railroading at an age when most men retire, how he gained possession of the mighty New York Central!

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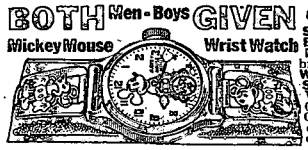

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The March

(NOTE: It is the purpose of this department to warn readers in all sections of the country of the latest schemes designed to defraud them, and in many instances, the names and descriptions of the operators. If you are approached by any of these schemers, get all the information possible and report the circumstances immediately to your local police authorities. They will know what to do. Rest assured that you will be doing someone a favor. Man is the only animal that can be skinned more than once.)

WHISKY

Don't Trade. You'll Lose

OWNERS of securities have recently received literature from the Union National Exchange of Cleveland, Ohio, operated by A. J. Goodman, suggesting the exchange of their security holdings for whisky warehouse receipts. This is just a word of caution.

YARNS

A New Spinner of Tall Tales

MAURICE PARRISH has a new one! Working in Missouri, just now, Maurice makes arrangements with local merchants for a woman to demonstrate and instruct women to use threads, yarns and patterns of the Bucilla Company. He says that fifteen housewives will be given an opportunity to buy the merchandise at a discount.

Having laid the groundwork, he then canvasses the town selling subscriptions to popular women's magazines by promising free training in using yarn. To verify his story, he has his victims call the local merchant. He collects for the subscriptions and then leaves town. Parrish represents neither the subscription agency nor the Bucilla Company.

SLEEPERS

Wake Up! But Not With "No-Doz"

THE Federal Trade Commission has issued a complaint charging misrepresentation of the therapeutic value of "No-Doz Awakeners."

Claims made on the air, in pamphlets and publications that these tablets keep motorists awake, overcome alcholic fatigue or depression, conquer mental dullness and are used by more than one million motorists are either false or exaggerated, according to the Commission's complaint.

EYE DOCTOR

He Collects And Runs Away

J. BOGGS, 40 years of age, dark hair and eyes, who drives an Oldsmobile with a Kansas license with a home address of Columbus, Kansas, is working through the Southwest as a "traveling eye doctor."

Boggs is a very smooth talker who takes orders for eye glasses, following an examination, but fails to deliver after he has collected all

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# of Crime

or part of the price of the glasses he prescribes.

CEMETERY LOTS
Supreme Court Takes Action

THE Supreme Court of the State of New York has issued an injunction against the operators of the National Capital Memorial Park of Washington, D. C., who were endeavoring to sell memorial park lots in New York State by trading them for security holdings.

OLD AGE
Pension Association Still Collecting

THE National Old Age Pension Association of Tulsa, Okla., is again soliciting funds to promote the enactment of old age pension legislation in Congress.

This has no connection with the Townsend Plan and the promoter, Dr. J. E. Pope, an old oil operator, was convicted in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1924 of using the mails to defraud and was later indicted in Denver in 1927. This latter indictment was *nol prossed* upon Pope's agreement to discontinue his operations and refrain from questionable practices in the future.

LACES
Mary Williamson Leaves Dayton

MARY WILLIAMSON, one of the famous "Williamson family," who ranges the country in an automobile trailer, stopping at tourist camps and peddling her "beautiful Irish laces" in the nearby towns, ran into trouble in Dayton, Ohio, recently. Picked up in that city, she was forced to refund the money he had collected and to leave town immediately.

She carries her laces in a shabby shopping bag in the bottom of which is a "sucker list" of women who are susceptible to her blarney. During the Dayton interview she admitted that the "hand-made Irish laces" she sold were actually cheap machine-made American products.

THEATRES
Picks Up Cash No Deliveries

O. W. DANZIGER who describes himself as a liquidator of motion picture equipment from Kansas City, Mo., is calling on theatre owners in other states and offering supplies at a low price. He collects cash in advance, but makes no shipments of merchandise.

"TAGGED"

CLEMENT H. CONGDON, and eighteen others who manipulated the stock of Rayon Industries Corporation through the tipster sheet, *National Investment Transcript* were recently indicted for mail fraud in New York City. Those interested should communicate with Federal authorities there.

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"Well, wise-guy, I caught up with you at last!" O'Keefe snarled

By Leslie T. White

CHAPTER I

The Lady Lies

WHEN Colt Williams casually flipped his room-key onto the desk and sauntered through the hotel lobby, he paid no attention to the people around him; a stranger in a strange city, he did not expect to meet anyone he knew. He failed to notice the girl in the red dress who rose hastily from the comfortable depths of a chair as he approached, because he was not at all interested in expensive-looking ladies; he was seeking a job.

He reached the revolving door and stepped into one of the compartments. To his surprise, the girl slid into the same compartment and as the door was already in motion, there was no alternative but to continue around the half-circle. The limited space jostled them together in mild confusion, and although he had entered the door first, Colt muttered a hurried apology. A second later, they were debouched onto the sidewalk in front of the hotel.

Colt readjusted his hat, bowed stiffly to the girl and turned away. He felt slightly irritated by her clumsiness and her lack of grace in not admitting her error. . . .

Abruptly he was seized by the arm. As he wheeled, the girl screamed at the top of her lusty lungs: "Help me!

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Prison Bait

"It looks like it," Colt admitted reluctantly

I've been robbed! He's a thief . . . !"

Colt tried to brush her arm away. "Say, you're crazy!" he snapped brusquely.

But the girl clung to him, shrieking frantically. "Help! Thief . . . thief! Get a policeman . . ."

Colt felt the blood mount to his features as bystanders began to stare in his direction. He grabbed her by the wrist and sought to draw her away from the middle of the sidewalk.

"Just a minute," he told her sharply. "You've made a frightful mistake. I didn't—" But his words failed to quiet her. On the contrary, she started to struggle with him and her cries grew louder.

A crowd was forming. Suddenly a big man jumped forward, grabbed Colt by the shoulders and flattened him against the stone front of the hotel. "Wait awhile, young fellow!" To the girl he said: "What'd he do to you, lady?"

Colt Williams Had Never Tangled with the Law Until the Morning He Was Caught Cold in a Perfect Frame. . . .

The girl's shrill cries subsided into racking sobs. "He forced his way into

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the revolving door with me! Crowded in there with me, he snatched my necklace and took a ring out of my purse! I felt him. . . ."

Colt Williams felt the sweat break out over his body. "She's insane!" he declared heatedly. "Let go of me!" He tried to struggle out of the grip of his captor.

Although Colt was a big man, his opponent was even larger. The latter threw his weight against him, pinning him in a crevice of the building.

"Call a cop, somebody!" panted the captor. "We'll hold this thief!"

"You blasted idiots!" Colt stormed. "If I get my hand loose, I'll—" He had no chance to carry out his threat, for a burly harness-bull forced his way through the crowd and grabbed both combatants. "Hey, what's this about?"

The girl pointed an accusing finger at Colt. "That man robbed me! I was coming through the revolving . . ."

"She's crazy! I never saw the woman before in my life. She jumped into the door after I was in . . ."

"Oh!" wailed the girl. "Didn't somebody see him . . .?"

The big man who had captured Colt spoke up. "He's a liar, officer! That's how I come to notice the trouble. I didn't actually see him swipe anything, but he did crowd into the revolving door *after* the lady was already in!"

Colt drew back his fist and took a swing at the big man. "Why, you dirty—" he began.

But the policeman jerked him against the building. "Wait a minute, mug! None of that stuff!" He turned to the girl. "You sure of this, lady?"

"Certainly! I guess I ought to know. . . ."

To Colt the copper said: "You hear what the lady says. You willin' to be searched . . .?"

The crowd pressed forward eagerly. Colt felt his face aflame. Hot anger surged within him; he had an overpowering desire to drive his fist into the puffed face of the big man. Reason deserted him. Straightening his rumpled clothing, he looked the officer in the eye.

"I certainly will not submit to this indignity. I don't know what her game is, but—"

The policeman silenced him with a wave of his hand. With a cynical scowl on his leathery face, he turned to the girl. "It's up to you, lady. If you'll swear to a complaint that he robbed you, I'll arrest him. But you'll have to assume the responsibility of a search. Give the word if you want it done."

"I want my jewelry!" wailed the girl. "Of course I want him searched!"

COLT bit his lip to keep back the words that sought expression. Trembling with rage, he fumed: "Hurry it up! This farce has gone on long enough. But just remember, I'll get a lawyer. . . ."

"Turn around and shut up!" growled the copper.

As Colt lifted his arms, the officer ran practiced hands through his clothing. Suddenly the searcher said: "Ah-ha!" He jerked his hand out of Colt's side pocket and held a pearl necklace to the light.

"That's mine!" shrilled the young woman. "That's my necklace!"

"He ought to be lynched!" the big man snarled, balling his fists.

"Shut up!" snapped the copper to the muttering crowd. He thrust his stubbly jaw close to Colt's face. "I suppose you don't know nothin' about this, eh?"

Colt Williams gaped bewilderedly at

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the string of pink pearls. Perspiration oozed onto his face and glistened in tiny globules. The officer's words made any remark that he might make ridiculous. "I . . . I . . . don't . . ." he began, then stopped in embarrassment.

"Was there anythin' else, lady?" asked the policeman.

"My solitaire! A single-carat diamond with a platinum—"

The officer pushed Colt against the building. "Keep them hands up," he advised grimly, then continued his search. From a side pocket, he extracted the solitaire ring, two watches, and a baggage check.

"Them watches yours, lady?"

She shook her head. "Only the ring." She reached out her hand. "Give it to me!"

The officer wagged his head, pocketing the loot. "Sorry, Miss, but this stuff is evidence now. Apparently this guy—" he glared at the prisoner—"is a professional thief."

"This is some kind of a frame!" flared Colt.

"I advise you to keep your mouth shut!" growled the officer. He glanced at the big man. "Will you step into the lobby an' call the station? Tell 'em Monahan, badge ten twelve, is holdin' a prisoner in front of the St. Regis an' wants a wagon."

"I sure will," muttered the big man. "The dirty crook!"

"But I want my jewelry!" bleated the girl.

The policeman took a notebook out of his pocket. "You'll get it, lady, only keep your shirt on. This guy'll have to have a trial." He pinioned Colt to the building with his shoulder, opened the book and poised a stubby pencil above it. "Now," he demanded. "What's your name an' address?"

The girl stiffened haughtily. "This is all ridiculous! The idea of keeping me waiting perhaps months—"

"Come on, lady, never mind the hysterics. What's your handle?"

"Ada Forel!" she snapped. "I live at the Dumas Apartments. Why I never heard of such a stupid—"

"Yeah?" cut in Officer Monahan wearily. "What number in the Dumas?"

"Three thirty four!"

"Okay, lady. You'll have to show up at Headquarters in the mornin' an' sign a complaint against this crook." Monahan raised his head and looked over the crowd. "Where's that big guy that was holdin' him?"

"He went to call the wagon," volunteered a bystander. "He didn't come back after that."

"Damn!" exploded Monahan. "He was a swell witness. Anybody else see this guy sneak into the revolving door after the lady here?"

Colt waited, hopeful that someone might step forward and corroborate his version of the affair. But apparently none of the crowd sympathized with him, for only an angry murmur greeted the policeman's query.

"See here, officer," Colt began earnestly. "There's been a terrible mistake—"

A siren wailed around a nearby corner, drowning the balance of his argument. The crowd surged away from the curb to make room for the squad-car that droned to a stop before them. Two burly harness bulls climbed out. As they walked over, Monahan shoved Colt into their arms.

"This guy made a mistake," he growled sardonically to the two arrivals. "Take him down an' book him as a dip. I found a baggage check in his pocket, so I'll hike over to the depot

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an" find what he's hid out. Tell the Sergeant I'll be right down."

Colt protested violently. "I tell you that baggage check's not mine! This is a frame-up—"

A big paw tightened on his shoulder, jerking him towards the machine. "Come on, mug," yawned the harness bull. "You better do your alibin" to a good lawyer." He pushed Colt into the tonneau and climbed into the seat beside him. "Okay, Joe," he told the driver. The latter nodded and the call-car rolled into the moving traffic.

A SICK feeling of hopelessness clawed at Colt Williams' diaphragm and for a few minutes, sheer panic gripped him. It was the first time in his thirty-odd years of life that he had ever run afoul of the law. He had read in the public press at various times, the weird tales of arrested criminals who claimed they were the victims of frames, and so on, but he had always smiled cynically. Now he was stunned to find himself in just such a predicament.

Was it a frame, or just a ghastly mistake? Had someone else robbed the girl, then dropped the stuff in *his* pockets? But what of the watches—and the baggage check? Sweat pearled on his forehead. What would that check reveal? And why had the girl sworn that he had *followed* her into the revolving door?

"Who caught you, buddy?" asked the big copper beside him. "Monahan spot you, or the dame?"

Colt wiped his face with a handkerchief. "I swear I don't understand it!" he groaned. "I never—"

"Sure," yawned the other. "The dame just dropped them expensive jewels into your pocket so's the law could hold 'em for about three or four months. Very likely, brother." He chuckled drolly and relaxed into the cushions.

Colt shrugged and maintained a moody silence for the remainder of the ride. Nor did he break it while they marched him up to the booking-office and forced him to submit to another thorough search. When all his belongings had been removed from his person and a receipt given him for them, he was asked a list of questions that began with his name and ended with his family history. Face red with indignation and his temper at slightly above the boiling-point, Colt was led into the jail and lodged in a small cell.

"Want to call a lawyer?" demanded the turnkey, slamming the barred door.

"I haven't got a lawyer!" snapped Colt.

"Tough, kid. You better get one."

Then Colt Williams found himself alone. . . .

Once again he was seized with panic. A sensation of being smothered came over him. He ran to the heavy door and folded his fists around the thick bars, shaking them. Finding them solid steel, he flung himself the length of the cell and sought to peer out the window. Then his reason took control and he sat quietly on the edge of his metal bunk and tried to force his mind to consider the problem sanely.

Before he had a chance for reflection, however, the turnkey opened the door and beckoned him. "Come on, guy, your attorney's here waitin'."

"*My attorney?*" Dazedly, Colt rose and walked into the corridor.

The official canted his head in the direction of a distant door. "You're a smooth duck," he grinned cynically. "Well, your mouthpiece's in the attorneys' room." He gave Colt a shove in the direction indicated.

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Colt walked down the corridor, pushed open the battered door and found himself in a large room. Two long tables ran lengthwise of the room and each table had a small, fence-like partition dividing it. A sign stated that one side of the division was reserved for prisoners, the other for their counsel.

He hesitated, watching the few occupants of the benches whispering across the narrow partitions.

"Over there," grumbled the turnkey, and pushed Colt towards the table nearest the barred window.

AS Colt approached the table, a small, dapper man rose and gestured him into a seat opposite. Puzzled, Colt obeyed, his eyes studying the man on the other side. The latter had sharp features and a pair of inkwell eyes that glowed too close together. The effect of compression was heightened by the falcon-like nose that strangely resembled a mattock. The mouth, a thin slash, was raised at one corner in a perpetual smile. The little man combed his long black hair away from his face with his spread fingers, then introduced himself.

"My name's Gesner," he said with the air of one who expects the name to be recognized, "Saul Gesner. The clerk at the St. Regis asked me to see if I could help you. I'm an attorney, of course."

Colt shrugged. "That's decent of him. I suppose I do need a lawyer." He did not add that he thought lawyers would be better inside the jails than out. Gesner did not appeal to him, but he knew that, for once in his life, he really needed some legal advice.

"How's your police record?" Gesner inquired directly.

Colt flushed. "See here!" he flared hotly. "I'm not a thief! That woman must have dropped those things into my pocket."

Gesner made a placatory motion with his hand. "All right, all right, don't get excited. We'll stick to that story if you like, although I have my doubts whether we can put it over." He leaned across the table and lowered his voice. "What will the police find when they reclaim the piece of stuff you checked in the baggage room?"

"I didn't check anything! If you're going to act as my counsel, you might as well get this thing straight: I'm not a crook, I've never been arrested before, I never saw that crazy woman until she jumped into the revolving door *after* I was already in. My home is in Oakland; I can readily prove my reputation is honest."

"You're not in Oakland now," Gesner reminded him. As Colt began to scowl, the lawyer hastily added: "Well, they are having a show-up tonight about seven-thirty. You'll be in that. If you're innocent, it should help you a little."

"A *show-up?*"

"Sure," went on the attorney. "They make you walk across a little stage with some other prisoners. The people who have been robbed are hidden out in the audience. They try to identify the men that robbed them. See?"

"But I won't submit to that!" Colt pounded on the table with his fist. "I'm not a criminal!"

"They'll think you are if you object to going into the show-up," Gesner reasoned. "If you're not afraid that somebody will identify you as a thief, you've nothing to fear. Anyway," he shrugged his shoulders, "there's nothing much we can do about it. That's the law." He rose. "I'll be here for

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the show-up. After it's over, we'll decide on what to do."

"Must I stay in this hole?"

Gesner spread his hands in resignation. "I'm afraid you'll have to until after the show-up. Then we'll see about bail, maybe. Good afternoon." He nodded shortly, swiveled, and left Colt staring after him, a hundred questions unasked.

"All right, you!" shouted the turnkey. "Let's go!"

Dazed, Colt turned and wearily followed him back to his cell. . . .

CHAPTER II

Bail and a Bodyguard

THE show-up was a thing of horror to Colt Williams. At seven-thirty that evening, he was herded along with a score of other prisoners into a small room. There was a door at one end of the chamber that led onto the stage, and through this opening Colt could watch the prisoners who preceded him.

They were marched slowly across the platform; while blazing lights played on their features; and made to stand in various poses.

The background of the stage was a white wall divided by black lines that graphically showed the measurements of the prisoners.

A fine mesh screen divided the grim actors from the audience, so that, although the witnesses could survey the prisoners perfectly, the latter were unable to see the audience seated in the semi-darkness.

A detective leaned over a little pulpit, and as each prisoner was led across the stage, he gravely called out his name, the crime with which he was charged, and his criminal record, if it was known. Periodically some unseen witness would identify a suspect, much to the latter's distress.

It seemed to Colt like a dreadful nightmare. One by one, the men ahead of him were prodded onto the stage, but somehow he felt sure that it could never happen to him. It was a big Negro behind him who jerked him back to reality.

"Yo' next, white-boy," grinned the gigantic black. "Twist yo' face a lil bit. Makes 'em worry," he added confidentially.

"Colt Williams!" sang out the detective. A guard grabbed Colt by the arm and hustled him onto the platform.

"Walk down an' stand in front of them numbers," he hissed.

Colt began to walk. The lights blinded him. He heard the bored, sonorous voice of the detective like some strange figure in a dream.

". . . six feet even, blue eyes, medium brown hair, no known record. This man was arrested immediately after picking the purse of a young woman."

"I didn't—!" shouted Colt.

"Shut up!" bellowed the guard. "Speak when you're spoken to!"

The detective continued his chant: "Arresting officers found two watches apparently lifted by this man; they are as yet unidentified and can be seen in the property-room. He had a baggage check which investigation showed was for a small satchel. This bag contained various pieces of jewelry that definitely tie this man into several jobs in this vicinity. Does anyone in the audience recognize this man?"

"That's him!" gasped a man in a husky, scared voice. "That's the man that held me up last week."

"Good," droned the detective. "Turn around, Williams; let the folks look you over. What did he say when he stuck you up, mister?"

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"He said: 'Yell and I'll kill you! Give me your jewels! That's what he said to me!"

The detective shouted at Colt: "All right, Williams, repeat what the man said. Hurry it up!"

Colt stiffened rebelliously. A uniformed guard walked onto the stage. "Do what you're told, mug!" he snarled. "Repeat them words the old gent spoke!"

Colt controlled himself with an effort. Better to speak and prove his innocence than stubbornly resist every effort to get at the truth, he decided. With a shrug, he muttered: "Yell and I'll kill you! Give me your jewels!"

"That's him all right!" yelled the hidden accuser. "I'd pick that deep voice anywhere."

A woman called out excitedly. "I remember him now. He came to our house, too! He hit my husband on the head. He warned me not to call out. I'm positive that's the man!"

"Any more?" urged the detective at the miniature pulpit. "This is a bad one, folks. If you recognize him, don't be afraid to speak up. It'll be many a year before he gets out."

Colt turned sick. Sweat seeped from his pores and he feared, for the first time in his life, he might faint. He caught the sound of furtive whispering in the unseen audience, then the firm voice of the detective came to him.

"Another lady identifies Williams. All right, boys, take him out. The next man is Willie Varney, Negro. . . ."

As the big colored man was led past, he nudged Colt on the arm. "Tough luck, white-boy. Maybe we go up together. . . ." Then he was led onto the stage.

As the turnkey started to usher Colt back to his cell, another guard sang out: "Williams is wanted in the attorneys' room!" The turnkey shrugged, muttered something about "needing an attorney," and took him back to the room with the divided tables.

Gesner wore a long face when Colt faced him for the second time. His faint smile had disappeared and he looked worried.

"Well, Williams," he demanded bluntly, "what have you decided on?"

"Decided on?"

GESNER dropped his voice to an almost inaudible whisper.

"They've got you cold, Williams. As your counsel, I think the best thing you can do is to take a plea of guilty to one count of grand larceny. If they hook you on three or four, you'll spend the rest of your life up the River. This way, if we can get the prosecutor to accept a plea, you should get out in about two or three years."

"*Plead guilty?* Why you're crazy, Gesner! I stole nothing. Those people made a mistake, I tell you."

Gesner drew his lips in. "As you like," he shrugged. "But you've had enough experience to know that any jury in the world will convict you. They can try you on about half-a-dozen separate charges. You're bound to get stuck on two or three."

"But, great Scott, man, I tell you I didn't do it! I can't plead guilty to something I didn't do!"

Gesner spread his hands, palms up, on the table. "You ought to play smart an' do what's best for you, my boy."

Colt squared his shoulders. "I'll fight this every inch of the way," he snapped. "If you have any other ideas, I'll get a different attorney."

"You don't have to do that," Gesner interposed quietly. "I'll handle the thing the way you want it." He paused, forehead ribbed in thought. For several

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minutes he remained silent, restlessly tapping the balls of his fingers together. At length he nodded, as though to himself, and said:

"'I believe the best thing to do is to get you out of here first. After that, we'll run this thing down. If someone is actually seeking to frame you, I want to know about it. I suppose you have friends in the city that can vouch for you?"

Williams shook his head. "I'm a stranger here, but the hotel people can testify to a lot of my time and activities."

"That's fine," Gesner agreed. "Now don't talk to the detectives. Tell 'em nothing. I'll have you out of here in no time."

A feeling of relief settled over Colt. "That's sure fine," he sighed. "I'll be mighty glad to get out of here. I can't even think now."

"Of course you can't," chuckled Gesner. "Now remember, say nothing until the bondsman gets here." He rose, gave Colt an encouraging slap on the shoulder, and went out.

But when Colt was again locked in his cell, the sensation of depression gripped him. He could not believe that anyone could be quite so helpless as he was at the moment. He wished that Gesner had not left so soon; the dapper little lawyer assumed a position of the greatest importance to Colt. He seemed like the last link between his old world and this terrible sphere into which Fate had chosen to hurl him. Suppose something happened to Gesner? Suppose he failed to come back?

His thoughts were disrupted by the appearance of a detective at the door of his cell. The officer came inside and sat on the edge of the bunk. He took out a package of cigarettes, stuck one in his mouth; and proffered it to Colt. He held a match while Colt secured a light.

"Well, kid," he said quietly. "What about it? Feel talkative?"

Colt hesitated. He did feel talkative; there was something kindly in the gray-haired old officer that seemed to permeate the gloomy atmosphere of his little cell. Pacing to the window, he drew the smoke into his lungs. Why not tell the whole story and get the copper's advice? Wouldn't it be construed as a consciousness of guilt if he refused to talk? He decided to be frank, but when he opened his mouth to speak, he suddenly recalled Gesner's warning:

"*Don't talk!*"

Gesner was his attorney; perhaps if he disobeyed the little lawyer's edict, Gesner would refuse to aid him. The feeling of panic returned. After all, an inner voice whispered: this man before him was a policeman and, as such, was duty bound to work against him. Colt turned and shook his head mutely.

The detective sighed, slapped his palms against his knees resignedly and pushed to his feet. "Lawyer, eh?" he guessed shrewdly. "Well, I suppose that's that. You poor devils all get the crazy notion that us coppers want to stick you to the limit." He shuffled across to the door and whistled for the turnkey. "If you change your mind, Williams, ask for MacRae of the Robbery Detail. I got your case." The door was opened then and he went out.

When Colt turned away from the door, he found that MacRae had left the pack of cigarettes on the bunk. A small box of matches beside the smokes plainly showed that the act was deliberate; a gesture of kindness. He chose another tube and commenced to pace the cell.

Why had the girl lied about him? What was her game? What possible

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point could she gain by her act? As the policeman had said during the ride to the station, her jewels would be tied up in court trials for at least a couple of months. It hardly seemed logical that she would put herself in that position for the mere fun of it. Enemies? Colt discarded that hypothesis at once; he had no friends in the city, let alone any enemies; he knew no one.

And the show-up! He shivered involuntarily. At least three witnesses had positively identified him as a robber! They had been positive, both as to his voice and to his appearance. Colt's head began to whirl—there was the strange baggage check that resulted in the mysterious satchel full of jewelry and other loot. The detective had said that the evidence secured from that baggage check would tie him into several other "jobs"!

HOPELESSNESS came over him. Perhaps he should have taken Gesner's advice and pleaded guilty to one charge? Wouldn't it be better to serve two or three years for a crime he did not commit, than to rot away in prison for the rest of his life?

Two or three years!

No! Colt's spine stiffened. He rose, smothered his cigarette against the cement wall. He'd call for MacRae and frankly relate the whole story from its inception! But as he stepped to the door to signal the turnkey, the latter appeared with a stranger in tow.

"Here's your bail bondsman, Williams." He opened the door and the newcomer walked into the cell.

When the turnkey locked the door and walked away, the stranger grinned at Colt. "My name's Otto Schley. Mr. Gesner sent me to see about gettin' you out of this dump." He smiled, exposing a gleaming row of teeth.

Colt grunted. "I've certainly had my fill of this. How is it arranged?"

Schley eased his fat frame onto the bunk. He was a large man and his flesh seemed soft and flabby. Tiny beads of perspiration dotted his face as though the very effort of standing up was a tax on his energies. His features were almost childlike with the golden blondness of extreme youth, although the man himself must have been close to forty. He laughed easily, but Colt noticed that his eyes had a metallic brittleness about them that belied his pleasant manner.

The bondsman wiped his face with a handkerchief. "Well, that depends. Got anybody in town with money to go your bond?"

"I thought that was your province," Colt said. "I'm a stranger in the city."

Schley scratched his ear, frowning. "Well, that is our job, in a way, see? But we've got to be sure you won't bolt the minute you're out."

Colt stiffened. "My sole purpose in getting out of here is to clear up this impossible situation. I've no intention of bolting, as you call it."

The fat man made a patting motion of the air. "Now don't get all riled up, kid," he grumbled. "We're not in this racket for the fun of it. Mr. Gesner sends us a lot of business and I want to oblige him about you. He's anxious to get you straightened out so he can get more of the hotel's business." He smiled meaningly. "It sort of works in a circle, see?"

"All right," snapped Colt, impatiently. "What about it?"

"The only way we can handle your case is this—the regular procedure, by the way, in cases of this kind. We'll go your bond and get you out of here, but you'll have to be with one of our private detectives at all times."

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Colt scowled. "You mean I'll be in custody? What's the use of getting out of here if I'm going to be in another jail?"

"You don't understand," Schley explained. "You won't be confined in any way. Our man merely stays with you; you come and go as you like: he will not be interested in your activities; his task is merely to see that you do not leave the state. He is in no way connected with the police, naturally. However," the speaker's tone became brisker, "he is authorized to carry a gun and to use it if forced to."

Colt shrugged. "All right, all right. I don't care about your detective as long as I get out of here. All I want is time to prove my innocence. When can I get out?"

Schley rose, gave Colt the form papers to fill out and called the turnkey. More papers, the surrendering of his receipt and the receiving of his personal belongings, the clanging of barred doors, and Colt Williams found himself on the sidewalk in front of the jail. Schley took his arm and walked him to a sedan parked a hundred feet from the station.

"I don't want the cops to see who your guard is," the bondsman wheezed. "Now they won't be able to tail you." As he jerked open the rear door of the machine, the dome light flashed on. Colt climbed inside.

THERE was another man in the rear of the sedan. He was as large as Schley, but one glance showed that his flesh was hard and firm. His skin was rough and leathery and around the chin were ancient pockmarks. His eyelids drooped as though too heavy, but the pupils glowed sullenly beneath them as he studied Colt.

"This is Mike O'Keefe, Williams," introduced Schley. "You fellows are going to be Siamese twins for a while."

"Swell!" muttered O'Keefe. Colt thought he detected a faint trace of sarcasm in the voice. The big man's hands were resting comfortably on his knee caps; he made no effort to shake hands. Colt nodded his acknowledgment and sat down.

Schley closed the door and the dome light went out, plunging the interior of the car in shadow. Colt expected the fat bondsman to circle the car and climb into the front seat and drive. To his surprise, he glimpsed Schley step back, lift his hand as though in a signal, then turn and walk rapidly in the direction of the police station. Simultaneously, a figure loomed out of the darkness, yanked open the front door and slid under the wheel. The newcomer never glanced around, instead, he started the engine, switched on his headlights and tooled the car into the middle of the street.

Colt frowned. "I thought Schley was coming?" he said to the man at his side.

O'Keefe grunted. "Naw. He hangs out around the jail." His mouth snapped shut and he fished a stogie out of his pocket.

Colt looked at the man behind the wheel. A queer presentiment came over him. The driver's head was silhouetted against the windshield by the lights of approaching cars; Colt could not distinguish his features. But the intuitive feeling of recognition persisted.

O'Keefe had stuck the stogie between his teeth. "Toss me a match, Flint," he growled to the man in the front seat.

The driver leaned his arm back and flipped a card of matches to the detective. "Catch 'em, O'Keefe."

Colt Williams felt the blood freeze

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in his veins! That voice—he recognized it! His very brain stopped working; his whole consciousness became focused on the amazing discovery of the driver's identity. . . .

For the man whom O'Keefe addressed as *Flint* was the same individual who had grabbed Colt in front of the hotel! He was the big man who had taken the girl's part in the ensuing argument and then deliberately lied to the policeman about Colt entering the revolving door!

Colt's first impulse was to smash his fist into the tempting little hollow back of Flint's right ear. But he smothered the urge as he realized his position. For the first time since the girl had grabbed him earlier in the day, Colt found a connecting link in the crazy sequence of events.

What the game was, he, of course, did not know. But this man Flint had been one of the direct causes of his arrest after which he had vanished to now reappear at the command of Otto Schley!

And Gesner had sent Schley! *Gesner* . . . He had claimed that the hotel clerk had asked him to handle the case. Up to this moment, the explanation had sufficed. But now, Colt wondered. Why should the hotel have any interest in him? He decided to find out. Trying to keep his voice at a level keel, he spoke to O'Keefe.

"Have the driver take me over to the St. Regis."

Flint laughed softly. O'Keefe nodded his head. "Oh, sure," he agreed, but he made no comment to the man at the wheel. Nor did Flint change the direction in which they were traveling.

Hot sweat dampened Colt's clothing. Although a stranger in the city, he knew that the St. Regis was located in the center of the business district. A hasty glance out the window of the speeding sedan warned him that the city was rapidly slipping behind them. . . .

CHAPTER III

Two Carburetors

COLT whipped around in his seat to find O'Keefe surveying him with sleepy, glowing eyes that seemed to wink eerily as they caught the reflection of passing lights.

"See here!" Colt began hotly. "I understood from Schley that I was free to go where—"

The detective slowly lifted his hand. Faint light glinted on blued steel. "Lay back an' shut up!" he interrupted.

Stunned, Colt subsided.

"That's better," the detective commented. He lowered his hand so that the gun, while still covering the other, rested on his lap.

"What's the idea?" Colt demanded huskily. "Where are you taking me?"

Flint chuckled again. "What do you care?"

O'Keefe yawned. "Don't be a sucker, guy—wake up!"

"Has Gesner anything to do with this?" persisted Colt.

Both men chuckled at his query. Colt didn't like the sound of their laughter; it had a certain grim edge to it that suggested disaster for him. Questions popped in his mind, but he refrained from asking them. It was useless. Furthermore, he did not want Flint to know he recognized him. That might hasten the climax. But the next remark of O'Keefe proved they were indifferent to what he knew.

"He don't seem to recognize you, Flint," O'Keefe drawled.

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The driver grunted. "I owe him a good slug on the jaw. I'm goin' to give it to him when—" Before he could finish his threat, the detective interrupted him.

"Shut up!" he advised.

It was not what they said, but their manner of saying it that warned Colt. For some strange, inexplicable reason, unknown to him, these men were going to kill him! Intuitively he knew that. Had they told him point-blank, he could not have felt more certain. *Why?* He ceased to think of that. They were planning his death, so what difference did their reasons make? He must escape!

The problem at hand tended to steady him; his brain became amazingly cool; his nerves ceased to tingle.

Escape? With a gun in his ribs? From a speeding car in a strange city? Escape—*how?*

Colt's left hand was on the arm-rest of the car. The interior was dim-lit, now bright from a passing car, now plunged in contrasting shadow. And in the opposite corner of the seat, O'Keefe slumped, watching him from under heavy lids!

Colt stared ahead; his fingers drummed restlessly on the corded upholstery. Vainly he sought some plan that would allow him to escape; some slight advantage that would give him an even break for the gun. . . .

And then his fingers, shifting nervously, encountered the ash-receptacle!

Unconsciously, he stiffened. It was loose! He might be able—! Cautiously, he inched an explorative finger into it.

He breathed his thanks to Providence. It was half-full of ashes.

Trying to be casual, he turned his head and looked at the detective. O'Keefe was peering at him.

"Mind if I smoke?" Colt asked, shifting his position.

O'Keefe grunted. "No tricks!"

With his right hand, Colt fished out the pack of cigarettes MacRae had left him. He slipped one into his mouth and made a pretense of groping for a match. Tensing all his muscles, he calmly turned to the detective.

"Let me have a match?" he requested.

O'Keefe swore irritably. He leaned forward to reach into his pocket, but he kept his eyes on his prisoner. For just a fraction of a second, he was off balance. . . .

In that brief instant, Colt acted!

In a blur of motion, he jerked the container free of its rack and hurled its contents into the glowing eyes of Mike O'Keefe! Then, before the surprised detective could recover, Colt crashed the sharp-edged receptacle into his face!

He glimpsed O'Keefe whip up the gun. He grabbed for the barrel, twisted as it exploded. . . . Powder seared his fingers. Simultaneously, Flint gave a sharp bleat of agony! The plunging car swerved out of control as the driver toppled sideways. . . .

Colt was hurled into O'Keefe's arms. In one mad whirl of lights and shadows, he glimpsed the glass show-window of a store. It seemed to leap at him as the driverless car hurtled the curb. He caught his breath, buried his face against the struggling chest of the detective. Then they struck!

Glass shattered around them, metal crunched, wood snapped! There came one mad scream from O'Keefe, then the bucking sedan keeled over on its side, wheels in the air, engine racing crazily.

Colt was hurled to the floor, but, by clinging to the broad bulk of O'Keefe,

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he forced the latter to absorb most of the crash. The big detective tried to protect himself, but his head struck the edge of the door and he sagged, quivering, with Colt on top. When the car finally stopped O'Keefe lay still, stunned, his face lacerated by flying glass.

COLT painfully separated himself from the burly figure and shook his dazed head to clear it. A hasty check-up as to personal damages revealed a jagged tear across the knuckles of his left hand, caused by the broken window, a wrenched leg, and minor bruises, among them a bad rap on the head. He raised himself and peered over the front seat. Flint was doubled into a knot, groaning softly.

The sound of voices stirred Colt into action. He tried to open the door of the car, but it was hopelessly jammed. Retrieving O'Keefe's gun, he smashed out the jagged fragments of the window and started to climb out. Suddenly an idea came into his head. He ducked back into the tonneau, jerked O'Keefe over onto his back and hastily searched his clothing. In a vest pocket he found what he sought: a private detective's badge. Then scooping up his hat, he climbed through the small window. Already, tense faces were peering through the store window.

Colt Williams ducked into the shadows. Someone shouted! He wondered if they had seen him. His leg troubled him, refusing to carry his weight. Stumbling drunkenly, he reeled towards the rear of the store. There must be a rear exit; there had to be!

The sound of falling glass came to him, then a vague silence as the racing engine of the sedan was shut off. The voices seemed very close; he limped faster.

He found a door that opened onto an alley. As he hesitated, footsteps pounded through the store at his back. The thought came to Colt that O'Keefe or Flint might have flashed out the warning that he had escaped.

Escaped?

Sweat seeped out of Colt Williams' pores, dampening his clothing. Had he bettered his position by his violent act? O'Keefe would claim that he had overpowered him—as he had—but would obviously leave out the other details. Colt would be an escaped convict, a criminal who had jumped his bond! Now Gesner, Schley, O'Keefe, all the rest of the strange mob would be allied with the Law in a mad effort to track him down! If he went to the police, who would believe his weird tale that O'Keefe was going to kill him? Flint and the detective would swear he was a liar!

But they had been going to kill him, Colt knew that.

He had a wild desire to run away from the city, to put it all behind him like a terrible nightmare, to return to his native city of Oakland. Then the full realization of his plight exploded in his consciousness. He couldn't do that. Even the police of his own town would be forewarned; they would be waiting for him to step off the train; he would be shipped back to this place to be positively identified by the witnesses—as a thief!

Colt wasted no further time in mental gymnastics; he bolted into the alley and fled toward a distant street. He eased to a slow walk as he stepped onto the sidewalk. The large illuminated dial of a jeweler's clock startled him with the information that it was not yet ten o'clock.

Was it only this morning that he had been arrested?

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He straightened his clothing, adjusted his hat and wound a handkerchief around the cut on his hand. Instinctively, he patted the gun in his pocket. Unused to carrying concealed weapons, the little revolver seemed to bulge conspicuously.

A passing cab caught his eye: Colt raised his hand in a hasty signal and an instant later, the machine slid to the curb beside him, door already open. He dove inside, the door slammed, and the cab tooled into motion.

Colt sighed with relief. There was something quiet, safe, here in the semi-darkness of the cab's interior; for a pleasant moment he had a feeling of complete isolation. But it could not last, the window in front slid back and the harsh voice of the driver demanded:

"Where to, gov'nor?"

Taken unawares, Colt was mute. The only place in the city that he knew by name was the St. Regis—and that was the one place he could not go to.

Apparently the driver believed that his voice had failed to carry. He almost shouted: "Where to, mister?"

Before he realized what he was saying, Colt shot back: "The Dumas Apartments!"

The moment the words were out of his mouth, he paled. He had spoken subconsciously. Instinctively, he edged forward to change the destination, then he stopped. Why not? The Dumas was the address given by the girl who had caused his arrest! Probably a false address, yet . . . ? Colt wondered. Perhaps it wasn't false; perhaps the girl really lived there.

The driver seemed familiar with the place, for he did not ask for the street number. He slammed the dividing partition, swerved the cab north at the first turn and increased his speed.

COLT leaned back, trembling. What should he do when he reached the Dumas? Should he broach the girl coldly; accusing her of framing him? Or did she really frame him? Perhaps some one else slipped the damaging evidence into his pockets? Then Colt's mouth tightened. Of one thing he was sure: the girl had lied when she claimed he followed her into the revolving door!

He decided that the time for thinking was over; it was action that would jerk him out of the hopeless pit in which he was floundering. Action had allowed him this brief respite from the menace of O'Keefe; action might straighten out. . . .

As though in accord with his thoughts, the cab jolted to a quick stop at the curb. A moment later, he found himself alone on the sidewalk before the Dumas Apartments.

The number the girl had given to the policeman evaded him, but he refused to let that worry him. Instead, he crossed the sidewalk, surveyed the dozen-odd nameplates attached to as many mail-boxes, until at last he found the one he sought.

MISS ADA FOREL, APARTMENT 334

Boldly, Colt pressed every button on the panel, except the one to suite 334. After that, he leaned his spread hand against the barred glass door and waited.

The lock buzzed. He pushed open the door, then stopped, frozen. . . .

For strolling toward him through the lobby was the dapper figure of—*Saul Gesner!*

Colt paused, uncertain. For one mad moment, he felt the urge to charge into the little attorney and beat him to a pulp, but reason prevented him. In Gesner rested the answer to the strange

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riddle of events. The *Dumas—Ada Forel*—now *Gesner—?*

Colt took a long jump backwards, landing in the shadow. The instant he was out of sight of the doorway, he sprinted to the corner of the building and waited.

The door swung open again and Saul Gesner stepped onto the sidewalk. He glanced indifferently up and down the street, then turned in the opposite direction from Colt and sauntered over to a coupé parked at the curb. Then he stopped, fished a key from his pocket and inserted it in the door-lock.

Colt eased out of his hiding place and started to slide towards the lawyer. He had a vague plan of thrusting the gun in the man's back and forcing him to talk. But the sudden approach of a car sent him dodging back into the shadows. Peering out, he saw Gesner climb into the coupé, then he turned his attention to the machine that had just driven up. The latter was a strip-down flivver with humorous epigrams chalked on the sides. As Colt surveyed the contraption, a boy in his late teens vaulted over the door and started to cross the sidewalk toward the *Dumas*.

Abruptly an idea came to Colt. A white cloud of smoke was pouring out of the exhaust of the coupé as Gesner started the engine; it began to move. Colt jumped out of his hiding place and grabbed the startled owner of the flivver. He thrust the gold badge he had taken from O'Keefe in the boy's face.

"Listen, kid," he snapped. "I need your help. Start this speed-wagon of yours; I want to follow that coupé!" He shoved the boy in the direction of his machine.

The youngster moved with willing alacrity. "Sure, Chief! He can't shake this can of mine. Why I got two carburetors!"

Colt climbed into the seat beside the speaker. "I believe you, but never mind the details. Better drive without lights."

The flivver started with a clatter that startled Colt; he feared it might explode, but when it rocketed into motion, the proud owner's boast was well taken. Gesner's coupé was easily overtaken within three blocks.

"Are you going to pinch him?" queried the boy.

Colt shook his head. "Don't get too close; I don't want him to know we're following him."

The boy nodded. "It must be swell to be a real dick. It is, isn't it?"

"I guess so," Colt admitted wryly.

"Are you working out of police headquarters or out of the District Attorney's office."

Colt grinned in spite of himself. "I worked out of the police station this time," he chuckled.

"Must take a lot of brains," mused the boy, swinging around a corner in the wake of the coupé. "Brains and luck."

"Luck had a lot to do with it. Look out . . . ! He's stopping! Duck into that alley across the street. Quick, now!"

GESNER had stopped in front of a drug store. Without hesitation, the boy whipped the flivver into an alleyway and slid to a jerking stop. Colt jumped out and ran to the street. Through the large glass store-window, he could see Gesner poring over a telephone directory. Then the boy joined him.

"Is that the guy you're after?"

Colt nodded, studying the situation. Suddenly he turned to the boy. "He's going to use the telephone! See—there's three phones in a row! Do you

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think you could slip across there, make believe you were telephoning someone and hear who he calls and what he says? I can't go—he knows me by sight."

"Can I? Say, watch me, Chief?" He flipped his hand to his head in a jaunty salute and ducked across the street.

Colt watched. He saw the boy saunter into the store, step up to one of the telephones and call a number. A moment later, Gesner closed the directory and lifted the receiver from another phone. Less than two feet divided the lawyer and the boy. After several minutes—it seemed like hours to Colt—Gesner hung up and walked back to the cigar counter. The boy terminated his call and coolly strolled out of the store. Once out of sight of the window, he dashed across the street as fast as he could.

"I got it!" he hissed to Colt. "I got every word of it! Quick, get a pencil before I forget that doggoned number!"

Colt jerked out a pencil and an envelope. "Go ahead!"

The youngster was gasping for breath. "He called Richmond 2436 and spoke to a Mr. Porter. He told this guy Porter not to be worried no longer because the fellow had been taken care of. I got the idea that this bird is a lawyer and Porter was a witness of some sort. Only hearing one side of the conversation, maybe it don't make sense, but—"

Colt nodded thoughtfully. "Porter a witness, eh? Yes, Jack, I think it does make sense—to me."

"My name's not Jack," the boy declared. "It's Sandford Z. Hunt. Well, what's the next step?"

Colt grinned and looked at the flivver. Then he put his hand in his pocket, took out his wallet and scanned the contents. "How much," he asked, "will you take for this racing car?"

Young Hunt frowned. "You mean you—you want to buy it?"

"Something like that, if it isn't too expensive."

The boy sighed. "Well, I'll tell you. I paid fifteen bucks for it originally, but I did a lot of work on it an' its got two carburetors—"

"I appreciate that," Colt acknowledged. "Will you take fifty bucks cash?"

Sandy Hunt's eyes bulged. "*Fifty bucks?* Say, gimme that dough before you change your mind." He leaned into the machine and ripped out the registration card. "Here, loan me your pen an' I'll sign it over to you. Boy, oh, boy! Will you put a siren on it, Chief?"

Colt counted out five tens. He had one left. "I have my doubts," he grinned. "Here's your money."

"She's a classy little wagon," Sandy sighed, fingering the pile of bills. "Most of those swell jokes on the sides are original. She'll do eighty in a pinch."

"Okay, kid. Now you better jump a cab with some of that money and go straight home. Many thanks for your help." Colt turned away to definitely indicate that the conversation was over.

"*Fifty bucks!*" whistled the young man, walking away.

Colt climbed under the wheel of the crazy little car, pressed the starter and flinched when it exploded into life. But it handled with surprising ease, once he became used to peering through the steering wheel instead of over it; and gave evidence of hidden power. He backed it out into the street and looked around. Gesner's coupé had vanished.

Colt didn't mind that—he had other

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plans. He drove blindly, indifferent to directions, until he came to a lighted pool hall, then he parked the flivver and went inside. Locating a telephone directory, he turned to the "Porters" and scanned the numbers on the right. It seemed to him that everyone in the city must bear the name of "Porter," for the list covered several pages, but at last he found the one he sought. Richmond 2436 was registered to a Phenias R. Porter on 786 Kenniston Drive. Colt made a memo of the data and spoke to the proprietor of the pool hall regarding the location.

"That's a pretty snooty district," the man told him. "Swells with plenty of dough live there."

He followed these comments with more pertinent details.

Colt blurted his thanks and ducked out to his whimsical conveyance. . . .

CHAPTER IV

Double-Crossers' Conference

THE house at 786 Kenniston Drive was a "snooty" building in a "swell" district. A massive, dark-brick manor with a wide veranda in front; it looked like an austere old spinster in a hoop-skirt. Colt had a feeling that one would find the interior filled with portraits of ancestors. He envisioned Phenias Porter as a tall, aristocratic gentleman in English tweeds with white hair and whiter mustache.

He parked the comical little flivver under the shade of a tree, where darkness made it less conspicuous, and walked up the stone flagging to the veranda. A square-glass lantern hung above the door, casting jagged splinters of yellow light in a semi-circle. Colt jerked the brim of his hat low over his face so that the glow, falling on the hat, painted his own features in heavy, contrasting shadow. Then he rang the bell.

A manservant opened the door. Colt told him he wanted to see Mr. Porter.

"Mr. Porter has retired, sir," announced the servant. His tone indicated that he did not intend to disturb his master.

Colt scowled, fished the badge out of his pocket and held it so that the light was reflected on its surface. He saw the butler start and followed his advantage by adding: "You tell him that I've got a mighty important message for him from Saul Gesner. He'll see me, I'm sure."

The servant stepped back into the hallway, pulling the door open. "Certainly, sir. Won't you step inside?"

"No," Colt said, shaking his head. "I've got a mighty good reason for waiting right here. Make it snappy!"

The butler was back within two minutes with the news: "Mr. Porter will be right down, sir." Then he took his leave.

Phenias Porter wasn't tall, he didn't have white hair or wear tweeds, and he wasn't aristocratic-looking. He was short and withered, with no trace of hair on his head; he wore an over-size dressing gown and a very-much worried expression.

"You wished to see me?" he stammered, standing in the doorway as though ready to run at the first sign of hostility.

Colt was quick to sense his advantage. "I certainly do," he growled. "All hell's bust loose! Do you know where Gesner is?"

Porter was suspicious. He peered over the bridge of his hooked nose and began to hem-and-haw.

Colt silenced him with an irritated gesture of his hand. "Don't stall!" he snapped. "He was on his way over to

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see you a little while ago; I wasn't sure whether he came or just phoned."

"He phoned!" gasped Porter.

"Well, anyway," Colt blundered on, trusting to luck. "That Williams guy has . . ."

Porter caught his breath and leaned forward. Even in the meager light, sweat was visible on his bald pate.

"He—what . . . ?"

"*Escaped!*" hissed Colt. "I've got to find Gesner. Did he say where he was going?"

THE little man shook his head. Obviously, he was stiff with terror. His lips moved nervously, but no sound came from them.

Colt went on. "Williams was desperate! He knew he was framed, of course, and there's no telling what he'll do."

"You're—you're not with—with the police?"

"*Police? Police?*" Colt took a long chance, his eyes glued on the twitching face before him. "Would I be likely to come to *you* if I was a cop?"

"No, no, of course not!" gulped the other. He backed into the hallway. "Won't you come inside? It's cold out there!" He was trembling, but Colt guessed it was not from the slight chill of the night

"No," snapped Colt. "I've got to get busy. Everybody that had anything to do with this frame is in danger until this man is caught!"

"But—but you? Who . . . ?"

"I'm with O'Keefe!" snarled Colt. "You know O'Keefe, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, of course. He was—" He stopped.

"Well, O'Keefe was wounded in the escape; Williams got away from him, so I've got to get hold of Gesner because I don't know all the details of the affair. Where do you think he might go to? What do you suggest?" Colt became aggressive. "Well, don't stand there shaking! You're in this, aren't you? You've got the same interest—?" He paused. Perhaps he had gone too far? He waited, anxiously, for Porter to pull himself together.

"He might have gone over to see Mrs. Finlay, or Doctor Barrows—"

"Let's see," grunted Colt. "They were the other witnesses weren't they?"

"Yes. You've got their numbers?"

"They're at the office," lied Colt. "Let me have 'em if you've got them?"

"What'll I ever do?" whined Porter.

Colt hesitated. He was working blindly, groping in a fog of ignorance. Now he was satisfied that there was some gigantic frame afoot, some extra-legal plot of which he was to be the sacrificial goat. But the knowledge would be of no value unless he could prove it with reliable witnesses, or with other evidence acceptable in a court of law. He had gained a lot from his talk with Phenias Porter, but little he could use in a practical way. If he tried to repeat this story, unrelated as it was, Porter would simply deny it and his word would rate above that of Colt's. And then a daring idea was born.

"Listen, Porter," Colt jerked irritably. "You can't stay here. You may get a visit from Williams, or he may go to the cops."

"But Gesner said—" the man began.

"Gesner said a lot of things before this bird got away," cut in Colt. "Right now, you've got to get under cover, and quick. Someplace where we can get you if we need you, but better not even let your wife know just where."

"I hardly know any place—"

"Well, I'm going to arrange that for you. You know Ada Forel, don't

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you?" At Porter's nod, he went on: "Well, you go back in, get dressed, and hike over to her place in a cab. Give me about half an hour to arrange things. Don't tell anyone about this. You're not home if anyone calls, either in person or on the phone. And" —Colt made his voice threatening— "don't make any blunders. I guess you know how serious this is, don't you?"

Porter nodded. "I understand. Where does she live?"

Colt told him. "Now," he ordered. "Go get me the phone numbers of Finlay and Barrows."

Porter turned and vanished into the house, but reappeared promptly with the numbers which he dictated in a cracked, hysterical tone while Colt jotted them down.

"I can't understand them letting Williams get away!" he wound up. "It is terrible, sir, terrible!"

"You don't know the half of it!" Colt sneered, turning away. Over his shoulder he flung his final warning. "Don't forget to be there promptly in half an hour!"

"I won't!" promised the withered little man, ducking into the house. Then the door slammed.

COLT'S next stop was a corner cigar store where he made three calls and learned a very startling bit of information. From the witness, Barrows, he learned that the police had been informed of the escape and that a city-wide search was under way. After receiving emphatic promises from the three people that he called that they would proceed at once to the Dumas Apartments, he left the store and went to his flivver, well satisfied with his luck.

And then it changed abruptly!

At the first traffic light, Colt pulled up beside a police prowl-car. The first inkling he received of his predicament came when he found himself staring into the pale eyes of a uniformed harness-bull. Perhaps it was conscience, perhaps it was the suspicious gleam he saw reflected there, but Colt felt the blood creep into his features. He glimpsed the flash of recognition that came into the officer's expression; he waited until he heard the copper shout: "Hey, you! Wait a—!"

But Colt Williams did not wait! Instead, he jammed his foot on the accelerator, spun the crazy little racer around in the very middle of the crowded intersection, and zig-zagged through the stream of traffic until he glimpsed the mouth of an alley. He aimed the radiator at the dark opening, tromped hard on the gas and the little car caromed between two tall buildings and fled like a scared bunny.

When he finally glanced over his shoulder, confident that his daring *coup* had been successful, he found the sinister red-eye of the police spotlight less than a block behind him!

Colt swung to the right, rocketed up another alley to emerge on a wide, semi-deserted boulevard. Young Sandy's words rang in his ears:

"An' she's got two carburetors!"

"Let's hope they're both working!" added Colt, mentally, and he jerked her wide open. He cursed his stupidity in not evading the police machine. Of course all the officers would have attended the show-up; that's why it was held at seven-thirty, so as to accommodate the eight o'clock shift.

If they got him now, his last chance was obliterated; he would go to the penitentiary without a fighting chance. His escape, considered in the light of O'Keefe's version, would be considered a confession of guilt. . . . *Ping!*

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A slug droned past his head. They were shooting at him. Colt gripped the jouncing wheel with both hands and sat very straight. No top or windshield offered resistance to the wind which lashed his hair and cooled his sweating face. He had to get away now—he *had* to! Unless he got to the Dumas within a very few minutes, all his strategy would have been wasted. If his witnesses got there ahead of him and put their heads together, he would lose out. No, there was only one slim chance ahead for Colt and that lay in eluding these coppers.

The crazy flivver began to tremble and wobble so that it was a constant fight to hold it on the road. Several times it reminded Colt of an old war-time Jenny trying to get off the ground; it threatened to fly. He swore and prayed alternately, but when he shot a desperate glance over his shoulder, he sobbed with delight. . . .

The police car was fast fading into the distance!

Colt ducked into a side street, extinguished his lights, and drove in darkness for several blocks. When finally he straightened onto a main artery again, his pursuers were not in sight.

He drove carefully after that, keeping a watchful eye open for official machines. At last, he reached the Dumas without further event. A glance at his watch told him that he was about ten minutes ahead of his appointment with the witnesses. He parked the flivver, patting its weirdly decorated body.

"You did that beautifully, old bus," he whispered. "A Rolls-Royce could have done no more. But then, you have two carburetors. . . ." He gave a little chuckle, pivoted and tramped to the rear entrance of the Dumas. He could afford to take no chances with all officialdom seeking his scalp.

Fear began to gnaw at his heart—the fear of failure. Suppose Ada Forel was not at home? Suppose Gesner had called anyone of the other witnesses? Was he walking into a trap upstairs in the Dumas? Would O'Keefe and Schley be there waiting for him?

He whipped the fear out of his mind. "Take it easy, fella," he warned himself. "You need all your wits to meet what *is going* to happen, so don't waste 'em worrying about what *might* happen!"

THE door to apartment 334 was identical, save for the small metal numbers, with every door in the long corridor of the Dumas. But when Colt faced it, he found this fact difficult to believe. The dark panel became more than the mere entrance to a woman's apartment, it became a symbolic opening into his own future. What lay behind that rectangle of wood and what was to happen there was to alter his whole life, or rob him of it entirely. And so his fist trembled slightly as he lifted it and beat sharply on the panel with his knuckles.

He heard footsteps inside. They moved towards the door. Colt braced himself for sudden action, drew his hat-brim lower over his blazing eyes, and waited. He was thankful that the hall-light painted his features in shadow. The knob rattled, a lock rasped, and the door swung inward.

Ada Forel did not have a chance to scream. The instant that her throat was visible, Colt's wiry hands shot forward. One caught her by the neck, the other corked the cry in her mouth. Together they swayed into the tiny entrance hall, then Colt, still clinging to her, kicked the front door shut with his heel. He piloted her into the living room ahead of him.

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The place seemed empty. In the brief struggle, his hat was knocked off and the girl saw his face. She gave a terrified bleat and went limp. Colt eased her into a chair, picked up a glass of water from the table and flung the contents into her face.

She recovered almost immediately. Her mouth opened as though she might scream, but Colt silenced her with a gesture of the gun in his hand. At sight of it, she froze.

"Now," he began grimly, "that we understand each other, let's be sensible. What's this all about?"

Some of the terror faded from her eyes to be replaced by an expression of shrewdness. It was evident to Colt that Ada Forel was no novice in crime.

"I don't—get you!" she stalled.

Colt chuckled drily. "You did once, sister. Don't play dumb! You framed me, or helped to frame me, for some reason. So let's have it? Why was I chosen to be the nanny?"

"I don't understand! Why, you robbed me—" she began, but he stopped her with an impatient wave of his hand.

"Now listen, sweetheart, I'll agree I'm pretty stupid, but not that bad. Well, you don't *have* to talk if you don't want to. . . ."

"Thanks for that!" put in the girl.

Colt went on: "But it's your chance. We're going to have a little family reunion here in a couple of minutes." He ceased abruptly and a sardonic grin stole over his features.

Someone had rapped on the door!

Ada Forel threw up one hand across her mouth as though to choke back an instinctive scream. Colt gestured her to silence, then keeping his eyes on her, he backed towards the door, softly opened it and called:

"Come in!"

Phenias Porter cat-walked into the room. He didn't see Colt standing behind the door, so he headed towards the woman.

"My gracious, my gracious, Miss Forel!" he wheezed breathlessly. "Isn't it awful? I was afraid from the start and I told Mr. Gesner that it was a terrible chance—"

Ada Forel was staring at him, venom in her gaze. Her voice was cold as a thrust of cold steel when she rasped: "Shut up, you blundering old fool!"

Porter gasped, followed the point of her eyes and saw Colt Williams. His mouth sagged, his eyes began to bulge and he drew air into his paunchy stomach in great gulps. His lower lip began to tremble, heralding a rush of words that somehow refused to come.

Colt gently closed the door, smiling. "So nice of you to come, Mr. Porter," he chuckled. "Please be seated."

The withered little man backed wearily across the room and collapsed into a chair. His distended eyes became watery with terror.

"That—that voice!" he moaned. "You—you're the man—" He could not go on.

"I invited you here," Colt finished for him. "I thought we should get together and sort of straighten this thing out. Would you like to offer any explanation, since we're alone, practically." He grinned at the woman.

The pair exchanged glances. The Forel girl said: "Listen, Porter, you keep your mouth shut! Understand! If you blab, well—" She made an eloquent gesture with hand at throat.

Colt shrugged. "I see, sunbeam, that I'm going to be forced to hog-tie you," he told the girl.

"I'll kill you!" she spat at him.

Colt laughed. He slid across the room and as she clawed at him, caught her wrist, jerked her around and

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pushed her face-down on the couch. She struggled and squirmed like a lynx, kicking and clawing, but once he caught her arms in his powerful hands, she could do no harm. Phenias Porter sat stiff with fear.

"All right, you," gasped Colt, grinning. "Hand me that table-scarf! Be quick!"

"I'll kill you for this!" shrieked the girl.

Porter moved like an automaton. Dazedly, he handed the scarf to Colt and stood helpless while Ada Forel was neatly trussed. He tried to stammer something, then backed into a chair, wringing his hands.

Colt added insult to injury by patting the girl on the cheek. "Now, Kitty," he mocked. "Sit there and sulk like a good girl." He reached into his pocket for his gun and started to turn towards the witness.

Then he froze in his tracks, his own eyes distended!

CHAPTER V

Build-Up to a Breakdown

FOR he found himself staring into the business end of a silenced automatic held in the freckled ham-hand of Mike O'Keefe. The private dick was flanked on one side by Schley, on the other by Saul Gesner.

Colt blinked unbelievingly; he could not credit his eyes. They stood silent, glaring at him, like three huge wraiths.

The first sound came from Phenias Porter. He began to moan weakly. "Oh-oho-o-o . . .!"

O'Keefe snarled: "Shut up, you!" To Colt, he said: "Well, wise-guy, I caught up with you at last!" His emphasis on the final word was pregnant with meaning.

Colt shrugged resignedly. "It looks like it," he admitted. He looked into the battered features of O'Keefe and could not resist a wan smile. The private dick showed visible proof of his presence in the wreck. Colt wanted to ask about Flint. Instead, he said: "You came in just at the wrong time. I wanted to know a little more about this frame."

Schley's laugh was bitter with sarcasm. "I think you've learned too much already. Let's move him, O'Keefe."

Colt knew what that meant. "Wait a minute," he pleaded earnestly. "There's no sense in killing me. Can't we get together somehow?"

"We got together once too often," O'Keefe growled. "Come along, mug, or take it here."

Porter emitted a low wail. "Don't kill him, Gesner! I—I can't be connected with a—with a *murder!*"

The lawyer looked at him coldly. "What do you suggest doing with him? You were fool enough to walk into his trap! Who knows what might have happened if I hadn't chanced to call Dr. Barrows and learned about this?"

"But—but murder . . .!" groaned the little man. "We—we might *hang!*"

Colt, taking it all in, saw the exchange of glances between the three ringleaders. In their knowing looks, he read not only his own death sentence, but that of Phenias R. Porter as well. A sudden sympathy for the withered little man went through him. Whatever Porter might stoop to, he drew the line at actual murder. Colt let his eyes wander over the men, gauging his chances.

They looked very slim. O'Keefe's swollen eyes followed his every move, seeming, almost, to read his very

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thoughts. Schley leaned against the door as rear-guard. Gesner, dapper and sure of himself, was calmly untying the fuming Ada. Phenias Porter, unaware of his fate, sat nervously on the edge of his chair, bald head alive with glistening globules of sweat.

Gesner finally dropped the gag from the girl's mouth to release a flood of profanity which made Porter wince and the other crooks laugh. The lawyer shut her up with a brisk slap across the mouth.

"Cut it, Ada!" he clipped. "Tell us what happened!"

"*Happened*—?" shrieked the girl. "What do you think happened? This mug rapped on the door and when I opened it, he snagged me by the throat, yanked me back into the room and when I saw who he was, I went blotto!"

"He's goin'—*blotto*," rumbled O'Keefe gloomily.

"Then what?" demanded Gesner.

Ada Forel massaged her throat. "Then he tossed a mug of water in my face. . . ."

"He ought t'a tossed the mug itself," contributed O'Keefe.

"Why, you . . ." began the girl, but Gesner stopped her.

"Keep quiet, Mike! Now, Ada what next?"

"He tried to get me to talk, but I played smart. Then this old fossil blew in, blabbing at the mouth the minute the door opened. I shut him up; then Williams got rough with me. I guess I gave him a battle though. . . ." She glared with satisfaction at the scratches on Colt's face. "After that, you birds showed up like the hero in a book. And what a triplet of heroes, believe me."

O'Keefe looked restless, his big trigger finger on the trigger seemed itchy. Colt felt the sweat pearl on his forehead; he almost wished he was back in jail with a nice, quiet penitentiary sentence staring him in the face. Three years in a cell would be better than eternity in a coffin, granted they would allow him even the coffin. He tried to stall, to glean the information he had risked so much to obtain. He addressed himself to Gesner.

"I know when I'm licked, Gesner," he admitted. "But for the love of Mike, won't you please tell me what it's all about?"

GESNER smiled without pleasantry. "Unfortunately — for you—we needed a silent partner in a little business venture. You fell heir to the position. Unfortunately—again for you— things misfired. You chose to be obstinate. We were forced to take drastic measures to protect ourselves. I hope you can understand our predicament." He smiled coldly again.

O'Keefe and Schley both laughed aloud. Porter said: "Oh my, oh my, oh my!"

Colt heaved his shoulders. "By obstinate you mean that I refused to plead guilty to a crime I did not commit. Is that it?"

"You put it very crudely," Gesner mocked.

"So you feel it necessary to murder me? You are willing—" he paused to let the effect of his words reach the terrified little witness—"to make Mr. Porter and the others partners in the crime of actual murder? If the thing blows up, you'll all hang—including Mr. Porter!"

"Oh, my stars!" wailed the old man. "Let us return the money to the insurance companies and get out of this frightful mess. I tell you, sir, I draw the line at murder!"

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"Too many words," g r o w l e d O'Keefe. "Come on, Mr. Porter, we'll give you a lift as far—" he grinned slyly—" as far as you're goin'." He stepped towards the door and groped for it with his free hand. Schley stood aside to let the detective take the lead.

Colt hesitated. He saw O'Keefe tilt the muzzle of the gun towards him, then he shrugged and moved ahead. Porter, oblivious to what lay in store for him, came to Colt's side.

O'Keefe wrapped his hand around the doorknob. "Now the first phony move on your part, Williams, spells curtains. Are you comin' quiet, or do I . . .?"

"I'll come," Colt sighed.

O'Keefe looked at Gesner. "Okay? You stickin' here?"

Gesner nodded. "I'll get in touch with the others and blow this down. Then I'm going over to headquarters. There is no guessing what Williams might have tried to do. You and Schley take care of—" he rolled the words— "any necessary details."

"Okay!" O'Keefe agreed as he jerked open the door and took a step out into the corridor.

He never completed that step.

A blackjack whistled through the air and crashed against his left temple!

As O'Keefe toppled backwards into the room, Schley bleated a futile warning and went for his gun. But he was too late. A burly form hurtled through the doorway, a heavy fist swished in a short arc, and the puffy bail bondsman sagged against the wall. His feet slid from under him slowly and he rolled onto his side.

Saul Gesner made a furtive movement with his hand, then checked at a brisk command from the leader of the two men who barged into the room.

"Hold it, Gesner!"

The lawyer gasped: "MacRae!"

The big police dick slapped his blackjack against his palm. "Yeah," he commented drily. "Seems like you been havin' a party, eh?"

Gesner tried desperately to save himself. "Lord, I'm glad to see you!" he breathed freely. "Williams got away from O'Keefe there and came over to wreak his vengeance on Miss Forel. I suspected he might do that, so O'Keefe and Schley came over with me to recapture him. I'm sorry you hit those boys; I guess they didn't recognize you at first."

MacRae grunted. "I guess they didn't." He nodded to his partner. "Shackle those rats, Dave. Kiss 'em good if they come to. I owe O'Keefe another good belt."

Gesner frowned. "Wait a minute, MacRae!" he snapped. "What are you doing? Didn't I tell you that—?"

The veteran copper balanced his sap suggestively. "Yeah, Gesner, you told me, but you're a liar! What do you think I been doing for the last fifteen minutes? Well, I'll tell you, you rotten shyster. I've been sittin' with my ear glued to a hole in the wall so I could hear just what was goin' on in this room." He grinned maliciously. "It looks to a dumb dick like me, as though you were putting on a sort of racket—"

Colt, watching, was the first to see Gesner start for his gun. He shouted a warning, but it was not needed. MacRae swore and took a long jump for the lawyer. Gesner sidestepped, jerked his gun clear and took a wild shot just as MacRae dove into him. A window collapsed; glass shattered in the street below.

"I been waitin' for a chance like this for years!" snarled the old dick and went to work with his blackjack on

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Gesner's head. He made a thorough job of it before the once dapper little counsel wilted to the floor.

Ada Forel made a hysterical leap for MacRae's broad back, but the other copper stuck out his foot and sent her sprawling under the table.

Colt grabbed her by the arm and held her. . . .

MACRAE went out of the room to return a minute later with a pan of water. He flung it over the moaning figure of the lawyer. Then he put the pan on the table and turned to Phenias R. Porter. Swinging the bloody blackjack off his thumb, he began:

"Now, Mr. Porter, I guess you know who I am! MacRae of the Robbery Detail; the same guy that's been sweatin' over those jewel robberies you an' your friends been having. I heard what you said a few minutes ago 'an' it'll count in your favor. But don't stop with that; let's hear the rest of it—*now!*" He thrust his big jaw forward and snarled that last word.

Porter offered no resistance. He acted as though he were glad of the chance to talk.

"I'll make a clean breast of it, officer," he sobbed relievedly. "I'm quite guilty of a horrible crime, but I did not want to commit a murder. I was willing to let the insurance companies pay. I was desperate enough for that."

"Start at the beginning!" suggested MacRae.

Porter nodded, wringing his hands. "When times were good, I bought a lot of silly, expensive jewelry for my wife and insured it heavily. Then—" he made an expressive little motion with his tremulous hands— "the depression hit us. I needed some money badly, but when I tried to realize something on the stuff, it would not bring anything near its original value. Somehow or other, Mr. Gesner found out that I was trying to raise some money and—well, he came to me with his plan." He stopped, daubing his face with a handkerchief.

"Go on," MacRae urged.

"Well," continued Porter weakly. "It sounded very easy and safe and as Mr. Gesner said, I had paid in enough to the insurance companies in the past. His plan was this: He would stage a fake robbery and dispose of the jewelery as his share; I was to collect the insurance which, at the old rate, was really worth much more than the present market price of the gems.

"I agreed to that, but when he came to me and told me that the police were getting restless and that we ought to get a goat—as he called it—I balked, for I didn't want to send an innocent man to the penitentiary. Then Mr. Gesner told me that this man Williams had been arrested while picking the pocket of a young woman—he brought Miss Forel along to prove his story. He assured me that Williams was a vicious criminal, already guilty of numerous crimes and that adding ours to his list could not hurt him in any way because, he said, the prosecutor would not try Williams on all the charges, but the more serious ones. I —I agreed and went down to the show-up to identify Williams. Mr. Gesner was there and whispered which man to identify." He spread his hands. "I guess that's about the whole story, officer."

MacRae swore softly and turned to the girl. He arched his eyebrows. "Talk, sweetheart?" he whispered. "A State's witness always has a break,

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or maybe you'd rather—" He paused.

"I'll talk," snarled Ada Forel.

"Don't let me stop you," urged MacRae.

"There isn't much else to tell," began the girl, then ceased abruptly as heavy feet pounded down the corridor. MacRae cursed, jerked his gun clear and faced the door. His partner did the same thing just as the door burst inward and two harness bulls charged into the room, guns drawn.

Recognition was mutual. Then the new arrivals saw Colt and sheathed their guns. "Okay, Captain MacRae, I see you got him all right. We gave him a merry chase but he got away. We just located his crazy speed-buggy downstairs and was wonderin' where to start lookin' for him, when we heard the window shot out." The speaker pointed to the window shattered by Gesner's wild shot. "I see you had a battle." He looked at the men on the floor.

MacRae nodded sourly. "Yeah, we had a party. Well, you birds just blew in at the right time to witness a swell confession from this dame. Take a couple of chairs." He turned to the girl. "All right, what were you sayin'?"

"Ah, nuts!" she flared. "You know what happened now. Gesner got himself into a jack-pot and had to find a boob to get him out of it. He picked on Williams simply because he happened to be one of a thousand strangers in the city. A bum guess, if you ask me. My act was to slip the stuff into his pocket in the revolving door then howl: 'Thief!' Flint was planted outside to play hero."

"Where's Flint now?" demanded MacRae.

"The hospital, Cap," contributed one of the uniformed men. "He picked up a slug somewhere along the line."

"Good," growled MacRae. "So what?"

"I'll talk in court," snapped the girl. "I'm not playing sucker for this bunch of chumps. Let's go."

MacRae walked over to Colt and stuck out his hand. "You're the luckiest bird I've ever run into, son," he growled admiringly. "You engineered this pretty slick. When I got your call to come here and listen at this door, I figgered this was some sort of an alibi, but you put it over. You'll have to stick around till the trial, but the State will pay the bills—gladly. There's a nice fat slice of the insurance companies' rewards that'll go to you, too. Yes, sir, the angels had their arms around you tonight."

TOO MUCH TO EAT NO EXERCISE!
THAT'S JUST THE TIME TO ALKALIZE!
ACID INDIGESTION
IT'S SILLY, DEAR, TO SUFFER SO.
I SHOULD HAVE DONE THIS LONG AGO.
HEAD ACHE
Be Wise— Alkalize
Alka-Seltzer
Alka-Seltzer Makes a sparkling alkalizing solution containing an analgesic (acetyl salicylate). You drink it and it gives prompt, pleasant relief for Headaches, Sour Stomach, Distress after Meals, Colds and other minor Aches and Pains
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Brains—Plus Hunches

By Edgar Franklin

"Would you do me a great favor, Chief?"

George Batey, Private Detective, Had Brains and He Had His Hunches — but to Recover Those Missing Bonds He Also Had to Have Plenty of Moxie

WITH a considerable thud, since he was only a trifle smaller than the Statue of Liberty, Mr. Bolt sat down behind his desk and glared at the law firm of Meldon & Carr. Yes, indeed, Mr. Bolt had insisted upon having both Mr. Meldon and Mr. Carr in for this conference.

Far from being the calmest of men at his best, Mr. Bolt this afternoon was far from being at his best; but at least he had finished his oration now and had finished walking back and forth and waving his hands and bellowing.

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"So there it is and now—*what?*" he demanded.

Mr. Meldon, who chanced himself to be an extremely calm person, glanced whimsically at Mr. Carr. Mr. Carr shrugged.

"For one thing, Mr. Bolt," Meldon began soothingly, "you still have a week."

"A week! A week! And what in hell's a week?" Mr. Bolt shouted. "You're lawyers! You're supposed to know what to do when—"

"Lawyers, yes, but not clairvoyants or magicians," Meldon smiled on. "Poor Lasher is dead and buried. You don't actually know that he took the bonds and there is apparently no evidence that he disposed of them. You say that that particular compartment of your vault hasn't been opened in at least three weeks, and that two of your clerks had access to it, as well as Mr. Lasher and yourself. You also say—"

"Don't keep on telling me what I say! I know what I say!" Mr. Bolt vociferated. "Here's what I say: I've known those two clerks since they were small boys and neither of 'em would steal a pin.

"Yes, I've known Lasher, too, since he was a boy—beat you to that one, didn't I?—and he was my partner, and even so I'll admit that I never really trusted the man, clever as he was in many ways. It turns out now that he'd been doing some private speculating and that he had plenty of debts; but his widow hasn't paid off any of 'em, so *she* probably hasn't the bonds or—well, hell's bells! What hash over that again?

"Here's all that interests me: that seventy thousand dollars' worth of bonds, the property of a client, is gone and Lasher *must* have taken it. We can't yank him back from the grave and give him the third degree, but if we don't yank back those bonds from wherever they are, within the week, *I*," Mr. Bolt yelled, "*I'll* have to make it up out of my own pocket or let this firm go on record as a bunch of crooks and—"

"Mr. Bolt," Carr's flat, sour little voice broke in, "when you have an ear-ache, do you send for a steam-fitter?"

"What's that crack?" Bolt snapped.

"We are lawyers and only lawyers, as Meldon said. Since you're so set against turning this matter over to the police . . ."

Breakfast was over now in the cozy little three room apartment.

As always before starting off for work, that capable young private detective, George Batey, paused before the mirror for the careful once-over. A snappy dresser, absolutely! Round, rosy cheeks, which often kidded the dumber ones into thinking him no more than a simple lad. Sharp blue eyes which saw all—or, well, practically all.

Sugar, his lovely bride, sighed adoringly:

"Gee! You're a bright-looking guy, George!"

"As a matter of fact, kid," George admitted modestly, "I *am* a bright guy. I'm the only one of us boys Old Sourpuss always turns loose on a case without no instructions, no supervising, no nothing like that, and sometimes he even asks me my advice. What I mean, the Chief hands me a job and then he forgets it, on account of he knows the job is the same as done."

"It's because you got such wonderful brains, George."

Young Mr. Batey frowned at his necktie and then gave it a slight cor-

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recting twitch, while he turned that one over in his mind.

"You couldn't exactly call it all brains, Sugar," he said at last. "Some of it is hunches. Brains—plus hunches, you might say."

THEN, having devoted the usual rapt five minutes to kissing Sugar good-by, he departed briskly for the day's labors—but the phrase stuck. Brains—plus hunches. Quite hot, huh? And also true, although you probably had to give the edge to the brains. The phrase was still sticking when he reached the agency and breezed into the Chief's private office.

"Well, you're lookin' great this morning!" George said diplomatically.

"You lie," the Chief answered simply. "I got a headache on me that'd be grounds for suicide. Read that through!" he barked, and pushed two typewritten sheets across the desk.

George Batey read it, some of it aloud.

"John Lasher—forty-two—junior partner Bolt & Lasher—supposed to have stolen seventy thousand dollars worth of negotiable bonds—got killed four weeks ago while huntin' in Canada—"

"According to what Bolt, his partner, said, he was out alone and he must have limbed a fence, dragged the rifle after him, got the trigger caught and blew the top off his head," the Chief supplied. "He was born up that way, so there's where they buried him."

"And from the rest o' what I read here," George Batey concluded mildly, "he's probably the only guy in the world that knows where them bonds are. So am I supposed to dig up his body an' make it talk?"

For almost a minute, the dear old Chief twiddled his thumbs and considered George Batey. "Omitting the wisecracks," he said, a bit too suavely, "by putting your head to it, Batey, you'll guess that we get paid real jack if we find those bonds."

Young Mr. Batey nodded, not too hopefully.

"Well, I see here his widow still keeps the apartment in East Fifty-third. Might be I'd go to work on her an' find out something about the late lamented?"

For almost another minute, the Chief continued to twiddle his thumbs.

"It seems, even with goofy Mr. Finnegan gone, we ain't had to shut up shop," he observed irrelevantly.

"Yeah, I heard how you tied the can to Finnegan," George laughed merrily. "Well, you certainly didn't lose nothin' when that number went off the payroll."

"So I had it figured," the old Chief replied, and his smile grew more and more amiable. "Y' know, Batey, with a bunch of nitwits such as it seems I have here for operatives, there's a tendency among this one and that one to have slight goofy spells. If you don't check 'em over careful now and then, people start pointing their fingers at you in the streets and telling each other what a lousy agency you run. It's been getting to me more and more, the signs of mental weakness I see around this establishment. Mr. Finnegan had what they call delusions of grandeur."

"Many's the time I've noticed it m'self, Chief," George Batey chuckled. "Many's the time!"

"He somehow got it in his head he was Sherlock Holmes and Vidocq and a dozen more o' them big shots, despite his being unable to detect the smell of onions around a hamburger stand," the Chief rambled on. "So I had the idea of going out personally with Finnegan

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and watching him work. Not asking questions or making suggestions, understand; just watching him work. For one day. One was plenty. I fired him. Oh, yes, and our Mr. Barton is gone, too, by the way. Last evening. I was out with him all day yesterday. I ain't a doctor, Batey, but I think his form of goofiness is what they call dementia præcox."

George Batey's chuckle was richer, happier.

"WELL, Chief, you certainly got the right idea," he agreed heartily. "A dozen times I been going to suggest somethin' like that myself, on account of some o' these palookas you got on the staff; you could drop a marble inside their domes, and it'd rattle so a deaf man could hear it a block away. With me, naturally, it's different. I got good brains an' I use 'em. Brains—uh—plus hunches, you might say, but mostly brains."

"Brains—plus hunches, hey?" the Chief echoed blandly.

"Posolutely! The next batch o' cards you get printed for me, we'll stick that on 'em, huh?" George laughed complacently, as he rose and stretched. "Well, I'll shove off now an' throw a few hot ones into this Mrs. Lasher, till I see does she have something to say we want to hear."

"Wait till I get my hat," the Chief said, also rising.

"You goin' somewheres, too?"

"All my life, Mr. Batey," the old Chief explained sweetly, "I been wishing for the chance to see some guy work with brains—*plus* hunches, and now, just when I got one foot in the grave, here it comes! In spite of the heat and the head I have on me this morning, I'll just tag along with you, Mr. Batey; not making suggestions or asking questions, you understand, but simply drinking in the wonders of seeing you work with your brains and your hunches." And then, as George still stared at him, evidently partially paralyzed, his cheeks a bright red, the Chief snarled: "Snap out of it, you, and get goin'!"

What the old prune needed, George reflected hotly as they drove uptown in the Chief's car, was one elegant sock in the jaw, to learn him where he got off, sticking his warty nose into the work of a high-class operative like George Batey and probably putting it completely on the blink. And, only these days jobs are scarcer than feathers on a tiger, one elegant sock in the jaw was exactly what he would 'a' got!

Lest he get it anyway, if George didn't quit glancing sidewise at him, twiddling his thumbs and smiling like a vulture who has just found a fine, dead ox, George ceased glancing at him and put his whole attention on the back of the driver's head. This was a thin, sober young man named Simmons, who looked like something that had dropped out of a hymn-book. In his fevery mood of the moment, Mr. Batey was speculating on what would happen if he planted a stiff jab right behind Simmons' nicely-washed ear, when the car drew up at the East Fifty-third Street curb.

George Batey suddenly returned to earth and managed a placating smile.

"Hey, lissen, Chief! I been thinking. I gotta ask just one thing; first off, let me see this dame strictly alone. What I mean, she's probably heartbroken an' timid just now, an' I can give her the sympathetic boyish line an' maybe get to her. But you might scare her, on account of you look like some big General or maybe a Supreme

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Court judge; an' once you scare a dame—good night info!"

"You might be right, at that," the Chief conceded, settling back and passing a hand across his aching forehead.

The day was getting hot, all right, George Batey observed, as he crossed the sidewalk and, entering the lobby of the expensive little apartment house, looked around. Beside the switchboard, the colored elevator man slumbered deeply. Great! Let the guy go on dreaming he was King of Ethiopia; what George Batey needed just now was five minutes all alone, to think out what you do in a case like this.

II

FROM the mail boxes, it appeared that Lasher lived in 2C. George Batey climbed the single flight and found the door of 2C just at the landing and slightly ajar. Still breathing heavily, he sat down on the fire-proof stairs, dabbed his brow and pondered.

Eventually, though, he did push the button beside the door and a plump, rather striking blonde of forty, with stricken China-blue eyes, opened it wide. Mr. Batey removed his hat and smiling brilliantly stepped right in with:

"Lady, would you be interested in an absolutely new kind o' vacuum-cleaner which takes the work out o' housework an' leaves the floor that clean a little child could eat offen it an' not get sick?"

"I would not—and get out!" the lady said emphatically.

"Now, don't speak too hasty, lady; you might be passin' up the chance of a lifetime," George beamed, and now he was in the center of the living room and the blue eyes had begun to snap. "This here Imperial Cleaner, which I'm demonstrating to a few selected customers, ain't like anything else ever put on the market. Probably you seen it? It don't make no difference what it is, lady, just so it gets on the floor—it cleans up ordinary dust, extraordinary dust, sugar, sand, peanuts, crumbs, anything! Lissen! You got a dog?"

"If I had a dog, I'd have sicked him on you long before this!" the lady hissed. "Get out of here!"

"Okay, lady, I will in just one minute if you insist," George smiled on relentlessly. "Only I was speakin' about hair, such as a dog would have. Well, it seems you got no dog, but you certainly comb your own hair—an' you got very pretty hair, lady, if you'll excuse my sayin' so. Now, where do you comb your hair? In the bedroom, naturally.

"This is the bedroom in here, ain't it?" George hurried on and stepped, quite informally, through the door. "Sure it is! Now, look, lady, you sit over there in front o' that mirror an' comb your hair. Some of it falls on the floor; there's even a couple I can see from here.

"You been out in the dirty street for several hours, say. Probably your hair is absolutely full o' germs, only you ain't wise to that. Okay! Them hairs drop on the floor an'—"

"One moment, peddler!" Mrs. Lasher interrupted, and now her eyes were distinctly dangerous. "Will you walk out of here or shall I call the doorman and have you thrown out?"

"No kiddin', lady, you really ain't interested in the Imperial?" Mr. Batey asked wonderingly.

"I am not interested in any cleaner. I have recently lost my husband and I'm giving up this apartment."

George Batey wilted apologetically before her eyes.

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"Well—I'm certainly very sorry about your husband, lady. I wouldn't 'a' come buttin' in like this if I'd known." He got out his notebook and pencil. "Lady, would you please excuse me if I ask your name? I gotta make a report o' the people I call on, an' if I don't I get fired; an' what with a sick wife an' three little kids—"

"Lasher!" the woman snapped. "Mrs. John Lasher!"

"Yes, lady. Thank you very kindly," George said, and busily wrote. "Could I please also have your first name, you bein'—excuse me, lady—a widow now an' our boss always raisin' Cain if us boys don't turn in everything straight an' complete?"

Mrs. Lasher drew a deep, deep breath.

"My first name," she said, with some difficulty, "is Adele. My maiden name was Morrow, and I was born here in New York, and I am white and I am over twenty-one, and—and—and if you don't get out I'll—"

"Aw, gee, lady, don't be that way!" George pleaded. "Us fellers don't like to do this no more'n you like it, only we gotta do exactly how we're told or get the gate. Thank you very much, Mrs. — what was that name again?—Mrs. Lasher!" he said and backed out.

WHEN it came to goofy spells, George Batey, apparently, could have them as well as any other man on the staff. What surely looked like deep thought narrowed his eyes and lined his round face as he bustled across the hot street after his interview and bustled into the car.

"Well, things is breakin' very peculiar here, Chief—very peculiar indeed," he reported. "Hey, Simmons! Drive up t' the corner, turn around an' then stop on the other side o' the street, maybe eight or ten doors up, where we can watch the entrance to this drum. Look, Chief, you gotta gimme the low-down on several things as soon as possible!"

"As for instance?"

"This Spanish dame!"

"What Spanish dame?"

"You seen Mr. Bolt personally, didn't you? He gave you all he knew about Lasher?"

"So he said, Batey."

"Well, then, please lemme have the dope on the Spanish dame," George said quite impatiently. "I know she's around twenty-two years old, very dark, very pretty, dresses very stylish an' stands about five foot three. But I dunno where she lives and what would her name be?"

"How the hell do I know what her name is?" the Chief barked. "I never heard of her before."

There was almost incredulity in George Batey's stare.

"That's very peculiar, Chief. If that's how it is, it seems maybe Mr. Bolt didn't give you quite all the dope," he muttered. "Okay, then. Let her ride; maybe she ain't so important. We can see about her later.

"But here's the angle I positively *gotta* get: what did Bolt give you on this pal Lasher had—it might be a guy he went to school with, I think, or something like that—about forty years old, quite short, dresses shabby except on Sundays, has long hair like an artist an' one very punk lamp? What I mean, it's glass an' don't fit so good, an' when he looks at you it sort o' wiggles an' twists. Who's he, exactly?"

The Chief scowled.

"Batey, he said nothing to me about any such party."

"The way it seems," Mr. Batey re-

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flected without approval, "I'll have to go and see this Mr. Bolt myself an'—*aha!* That looks like it might be something!" he cried sharply, as a small delivery truck stopped near the house across the way, and he hopped quite spasmodically from the Chief's car.

"Hey, wait a minute!" the Chief called. "Are you kidding me somehow here, or have you gone completely nuts yourself, or what kind of act is it you're putting on?"

"Lissen, Chief!" George said swiftly. "It might be something very excitin' is goin' t' break here in a few minutes—an' also it might not, of course. I can't say positive. Only I have t' stay over there by the house an' meanwhile will you kindly watch this side o' the street an' see does either this Spanish frill or the one-eyed guy come along? Suppose one of 'em does, will you watch very careful an' see do they look up at Mrs. Lasher's windows? That's them, the two over the entrance on the second floor. It might be she'd make a signal—maybe wave a handkerchief or pull down the shade, or the like o' that. Thanks very much, Chief," Mr. Batey said hastily; and then, composing himself, he loitered over to the house and past it, and turned and loitered back again.

Thus fifteen rather torrid minutes passed, while the climbing sun shone down upon the car and the Chief and young Simmons, occasionally glancing across in Batey's direction, studied with lively interest each passerby on this side of the way—and studied them vainly, for there was no Spanish girl and no one-eyed man.

George himself still sauntered back and forth, back and forth, an unlighted cigarette in his hand.

Now and then, with visibly growing annoyance, he peered up at the Lasher windows. Presently he took to frowning, more and more impatiently. A lanky negro in overalls, with a large pasteboard box under his arm, shuffled out of the apartment house and paused to light his pipe and George seemed suddenly reminded of his cigarette, for he said:

"Hey, buddy! Got another match?"

THE negro obligingly lighted one. George, leaning forward a bit too hastily, knocked the box from under his arm. He stooped hurriedly and retrieved it and grinned his apologetic: "Beg your pardon, feller. Thanks for the light."

And after that, smoking, he resumed his walk; but in the matter of another five minutes it became apparent that things in George's neighborhood had gone distinctly cold. He consulted his wrist-watch, stared hard at the Lasher windows for a second or two, and finally shrugged and crossed to the car again.

"Well, it seems I rung in a false alarm that time, Chief," he confessed, "and that makes it kind o' complicated. What I mean, there's one other lead I gotta follow right away an' I dunno how long it'll take me—maybe one hour, maybe ten, accordin' to where I pick him up an' where he goes. So would you do me a great favor, Chief?"

"Huh?" the Chief grunted suspiciously.

"Would you mind sittin' here in the car till quarter to eleven, an' seein' does either this Spanish dame or the one-eyed guy come past an' if so, what they do an' especially if they go in that house. If neither of 'em ain't here by quarter to eleven, it's a bet they ain't comin'."

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The Chief cleared his throat with an unpromising rumble.

"Look here, Mr. Batey," he said, "it wasn't to do your odd jobs I came along. It was to watch you use your brains an' your hunches!"

"Chief, believe it or not, you're watchin' 'em this minute!" George hurriedly assured him. "Only, the way it stands, I dassent leave this block uncovered an' dassent stay here till I get a relief. So if you'd just be kind enough to do that little thing, I—" Wild-eyed, he broke off and consulted his watch again. "Cripes, Chief!" he howled. "Looka the time it is! *Looka the time!*"

"Where'd he go, Simmons?" the Chief stuttered in savage bewilderment, two seconds later.

"Into the East River, if he hasn't stopped," Simmons ventured. "That's only a couple of blocks over, Chief."

Mrs. Batey's little boy, to all appearances, had indeed gone goofy!

Having whizzed around the corner at projectile speed, he at once slowed down and, hailing a taxi, bowled comfortably away to Pennsylvania Station. There he made straight for the airlines desk and asked questions and more questions, finally leaving with a pocketful of time-tables.

Next he moved on to the Postal Telegraph desk and, after some deep thought, wrote out a wire and paid for it—and with that out of the way, the day's work for George Batey seemed, strangely enough, to be over. At all events, he ambled lazily to the subway and just after noon he barged in upon the astonished Sugar with:

"Rustle some chow, kid, an' then wash your face an' put on the old gray bonnet, on account of I have the afternoon off an' we're goin' to pitchers!"

Toward four o'clock, though, when the intermission came, a little of the old business instinct seemed to flicker up in George Batey.

He relinquished his grip on Sugar's hand and slowly made his way to a telephone booth in the lobby, and he yawned as he dialed his number. But when the old Chief's voice came over the wire, George spoke with a sort of cyclonic briskness: "Chief! Please lissen very careful, because I have to spill this fast or run the risk o' losin' a certain party. Here's the dope, Chief, an' will you kindly take it just the way it stands? Get hold o' Mr. Bolt, an' tell him he has to drive up to Halsford, New York, this evening, absolutely not later than a quarter to ten.

"Tell him he has to go into the Halsford Hotel there an' sit away back somewheres in the lobby, where he can't be seen easy."

"*What?*" the Chief roared.

"You better write that down, Chief—Halsford. It's a little tank near Nyack. Yeah, I know this sounds peculiar, Chief, but this is one o' the most peculiar cases I ever was on," George hurried along. "An' then will you kindly be in front o' our office at eight o'clock with the car, on account of we're probably also takin' a ride to Halsford. Tell Mr. Bolt he's to make out he don't know us, an' just sit there an' keep his eyes open, know what I mean?"

"No! I hear what you say, but I don't know what you mean, and now listen awhile yourself, Mr. Batey!" the Chief replied energetically, for he had been thinking during these hours. "What screwy thing is it you're doing this day? I sat in that damned hot car like something stuffed till one o'clock, bugging my eyes out when anybody passed, and missing my lunch and getting a head on me that'd—"

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"Neither of 'em was there, Chief—the Spanish dame or the one-eyed guy?"

"They were not!"

"Then it adds up exactly right, Chief. They shouldn't 'a' been there. Now, will you please make Mr. Bolt understand he has to sit quiet an' pretend he don't know us an'—hey, there! That's him now, passin' the booth! I gotta go, Chief!"

He hung up with a bang. The odd emotional spasm seemed to have passed, for Mr. Batey emerged, smiling placidly, from the booth, yawned again, had another cigarette and, just as the news weekly came on, lounged back to hold Sugar's hand again.

III

"ALWAYS on the tick, Chief!" George Batey observed brightly, as he stepped into the Chief's car at exactly eight o'clock. "How's tricks?"

"Thanks mostly to you, I now have a bean on me the size and feeling of a red-hot watermelon," the Chief responded acidly. "Mr. Batey, would it be impolite to ask what in hell this is all about—me gulping dinner so fast I had to take two tablets, and missing the fights tonight and also paying Simmons here for overtime?"

George Batey glanced appraisingly at him, sitting there with one hand on his brow.

The light in the dear old Chief's eye, as he considered George, never in this world could have been mistaken for adoration.

"The way I understood it this mornin', Chief," George said gently, "you was askin' no questions an' makin' no suggestions an'—"

"Leave it lay just like that, then, Mr. Batey!" the Chief growled wickedly, and stared straight out of the window on his own side and gnawed his long cigar.

Well, it seemed this was not one of those whoopee rides, where everybody gets pinched for laughing and hollering, George reflected after a time. In fact, it was like riding just behind the hearse. Here they were already in Jersey and heading north, and still the old prune hadn't loosed up another solitary word.

"Er—what kind of a gent is this Mr. Bolt?" George finally essayed in desperation.

"He's the size of a house, Batey, and just the type that'd take a sock, even at a runt like you, if it so happened he found he'd been sent on a wild goose chase on a night like this," the Chief responded pleasantly. "And he mightn't be the only one that'd take a sock at you!"

Conversation crawled back into its coffin and pulled down the lid with a slam. Up and down George Batey's spine frisky little jitters played tag. Not to kid himself at all, he'd taken quite a few liberties with the dear old Chief this day, and if anything could slip—and he saw now that plenty of things could slip—

"Well, I guess this is the Halsford Hotel," Simmons sighed, as they stopped before a huge, rambling wooden structure.

It was hot outdoors, but it was much hotter in the wide lobby of the hotel.

The Chief moaned faintly as he sniffed the stifling air and, having mopped his forehead, tenderly held his head for a moment. From the far side of the place came the faintest suggestion of an answering moan. George Batey glanced flittingly toward the potted palms over in that direction. Yeah, that was Mr. Bolt all right, sit-

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ting there and staring blackly at the Chief and wiping his own brow.

He was the size of two houses; he practically filled that side of the room; and wouldn't he, too, have to be one of these cases that go mad with the heat! He was fanning himself now with a folded newspaper and gasping like a newly-caught bass.

The clock on the wall stated that it lacked just eight minutes of ten.

"Mr. Batey," the Chief said, "be nice enough to consider that I'm still asking no questions, only tell me: is there a deadline somewhere in this performance of yours, or are we supposed to sit here and fry on this griddle till dawn?"

"Gimme till ten o'clock, Chief, or maybe two or three minutes after. If it ain't broke then, you can say I'm goofy and—"

"I don't have to wait till ten o'clock," the Chief responded. "The way you been acting this day, I'll say without fear of contradiction right now that you're goofy. First and last, I've stood a great deal from you, Mr. Batey. At times you've got results and at times you've got other things; but, by the livin' stars above us, Mr. Batey! when you take a man with a bun like mine over the jumps you've taken me today, if the very floor of this damned blast-furnace ain't strewed with results by ten o'clock—" He broke off, considering his swinging foot. "That's a grand, heavy sole, ain't it?" he rumbled.

"I get it, Chief," Mr. Batey sighed.

The Chief settled back with another moan, staring at the clock. Mr. Bolt, fuming and shifting across the lobby, was staring at the Chief and, one almost guessed, getting ready to come over and speak his mind about the whole bizarre affair. George Batey dragged his blue eyes from the pair of them and himself watched the clock.

THE thing had gone nuts! They hadn't been here ten seconds; but it claimed they'd been here five minutes. Yes, it said 9:57 now—and nothing at all had happened. And now it had whisked along to 9:58, and still nothing had happened.

Mr. Batey, glancing at the door, dashed a bright drop or two from his forehead, although he was not particularly warm. Yeah, and *now* it was 9:59, and *still* nothing had happened! George Batey swallowed audibly and edged a little farther from the Chief, just in case. Okay. It seemed that very shortly now he'd find out if he could run faster than the old prune; it seemed that for once he'd got a trifle too smart: the big hand had passed the figure 12 and it was marching right along to 10:01.

The Chief dropped his foot and cleared his throat.

"In the cases of Finnegan and Barton," he said, "I spent just a few hours around town with 'em, getting thoroughly disgusted, and there was no violence when we parted. But in the case of yourself, Mr. Batey—"

"Chief!" George said huskily, as a car stopped outside. "Will you hold it just one more minute before you start anything?"

Hurried steps were on the wooden veranda now. Two bellhops dashed forward, for a tall, well-dressed, lean-faced man with a little black moustache was entering the hotel and peering about anxiously. He carried a big grip and a little grip.

And, over in his own corner by the palms, Mr. Bolt seemed upon the verge of a seizure!

Mr. Bolt in this moment was indeed

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something to watch. His mouth wide open, his huge hands gripping the arms of his chair, Mr. Bolt's eyes bulged out of his cheeks suddenly gone white. That odd pose he held for some three seconds.

Then, just as the tiger calls through the bars at feeding-time, Mr. Bolt said: "Aaaarrrr!"

Over by the desk, the lean man started violently, whirled around and himself went quite as white as Mr. Bolt. Although, George Batey noted Mr. Bolt was no longer white. He had turned to a nice crimson and now he was turning to a royal purple. The lean man, gasping, dropped his bags and turned to run, but Mr. Bolt was out of his chair and with the strangest bird-like effect, his great bulk considered, he was soaring through the air toward the newcomer; and as he soared he bellowed: "Lasher! *Lasher!*"

ON bowled the good Chief's car through the night, back toward the city, and still the good Chief patted George Batey's thigh.

"Well, it sure looked like a crazy job, George, but it was a wonderful job, at that!" the good Chief chuckled.

Albeit he was still a trifle weak about the knees, George Batey laughed jauntily.

"Yeah, Chief, after the big punk knocked most o' the stuffin' out o' Lasher an' got the little bag open, the results was certainly strewed all over the floor, just the way you said you wanted 'em. Not a bond missin', accordin' to Bolt. Why, you don't need to look so puzzled, Chief. It was simple for a guy with brains like mine. Here! Give a look at this. I picked it up when it fell out o' Lasher's pocket, after Mr. Bolt give him that first bust on the snoot."

The Chief switched on the ceiling light and read the telegram:

MR. HOWARD WORTMAN HOTEL STATLER CLEVELAND

TAKE FIRST PLANE EAST AFTER YOU RECEIVE THIS STOP MEET ME IN LOBBY OF HALSFORD HOTEL N.Y. AT TEN SHARP TONIGHT STOP BE SURE TO BRING EVERYTHING WITH YOU AS WE SHALL HAVE TO SAIL FOR EUROPE AT ONCE STOP DO NOT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES CALL UP OR OTHERWISE TRY TO COMMUNICATE WITH ME.

ADELE

"And who the devil's Howard Wortman and who's this Adele?" the Chief frowned.

Mr. Batey stretched his legs and laughed comfortably.

"Aw, Chief, the bean has got you; y'ain't at your best t'night," he said indulgently. "Wortman is Lasher, of course, an' Adele is Mrs. Lasher. Huh? Well, here's how it lay, Chief. I went up in that tenement an' sat on the stairs to think how I'd go at the dame. Her door was open. Downstairs I could hear the clerk snorin' beside the switchboard o' the house phone. Get it?

"Well, suddenly it gets to me, the dame in there is talkin' to someone on the telephone, Chief! She's callin' him 'John, dear.' She's telling him everything is okey-dokey an' *of course* he's dead—an' then she laughs! So I had a hunch, Chief, Lasher ain't dead at all! Then she said somethin' about sendin' him the gray one an' the blue one, an' then she said good-by an' sent him a kiss over the wire. So next she rung up some dry-cleanin' establishment and wanted t' know wasn't that blue suit an' that gray suit gettin' delivered instantly, an' it seemed they

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said in about ten minutes. She rang off, an' then it got to me she had a private phone in there, on account of the clerk downstairs was still snorin'.

"WELL, next thing, his buzzer started an' he woke up an' Mrs. Lasher told him she'd want the janitor to take a package to the express office in about twenty minutes. So then, when I was talkin 'to you, I seen the cleaner deliver the stuff an'—why, when the janitor come out with the package, I managed so I'd see what name Lasher was goin' under an' where he was, an' then I sent him this wire. You're gettin' it, ain't you, Chief?"

"Yes, I'm getting it," the Chief answered, a trifle grimly. "The way it looks, this dame laid the whole thing in your lap before you even seen her. You might have been a little more frank with me, George. I got the idea for a while there that you was trying to make a monkey out o' me. Give me the rest of it. Who was the Spanish dame and who was the one-eyed man?"

"Well, I tell you, Chief," George said happily. "The way it looked, you kind o' felt I wasn't earnin' my pay, so I started usin' my brains a little an' I seen I better make a few extra motions, so's I'd look more like a detective. What I mean, Chief, I just stuck them two people in t' keep you interested an' sort o' make it harder!"

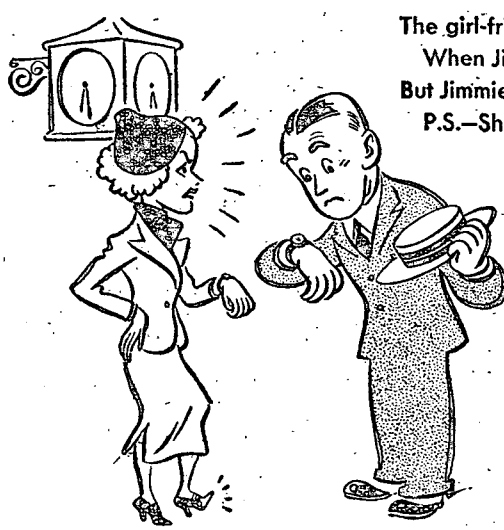
"Batey," the Chief said, after a moment, "are you telling me I was sitting there watching for somebody that ain't? Are you saying there never was any Spanish dame or any one-eyed guy at all?"

"You got it, Chief!" George Batey said. "Haw! haw haw! haw!"

For some reason, the good old Chief failed to laugh. The sounds in his throat were a queer merging of wheezes, rattles and perhaps one thin squeak.

"Well, Mr. Batey," he began thickly, "you—you—"

He said more, of course. Indeed, he said a great deal more. But after a full minute Simmons pulled over to the side of the road and, having stopped the car, turned squarely around.



The girl-friend made an awful fuss
When Jimmie turned up late,
But Jimmie brought her Beech-Nut Gum...
P.S.—She kept the date!

Keep calm with

BEECH-NUT PEPPERMINT GUM
. . . is so good it's the most popular flavor of any gum sold in the United States.

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"Say, excuse me, Chief!" he shouted. "My father is a Methodist minister and he taught me early what I could listen to and what I couldn't listen to. A 'damn' now and then and a 'hell" now and then, a person has to hear, I suppose; but if you don't cut out that language you're using to Mr. Batey, I'm stepping out of this car and you can drive it home yourself!"

The Too-Careful Killer

THIS Italian was an unusually accomplished cutthroat, for he was not only a professional killer and burglar, but an expert forger to boot, and one who took pride in his work.

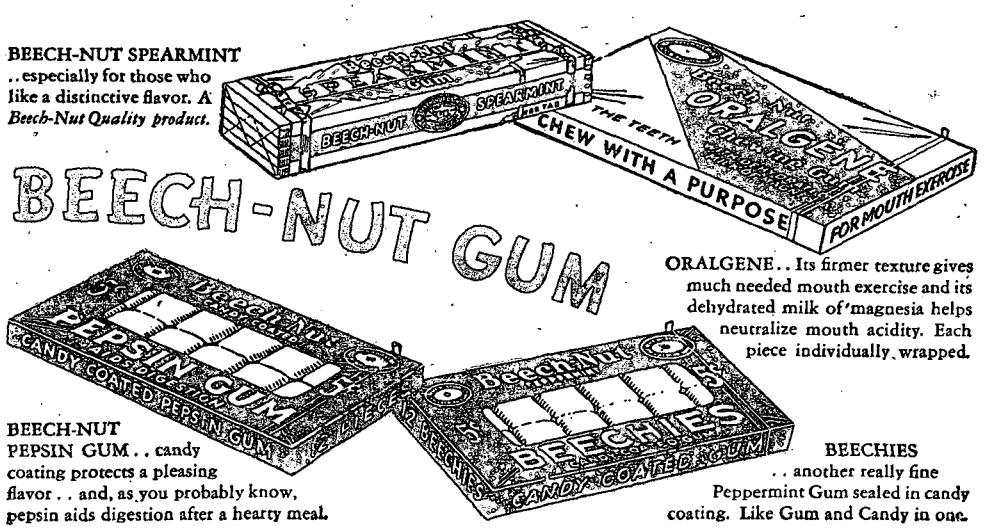
This being the case, it is not so surprising that, having broken into the villa of a miser near Naples, and having secured a fat lot of plunder, and having found a letter signed with the miser's name, he scribbled a note in a similar hand, implicating a cousin of the miser in the crime.

Now criminals who ably combine murder and forgery are rare indeed, and it was not long before the Naples police had him in their net. When he asked them why his forgery had failed to deceive him, they informed him that the miser could not read or write—that his housekeeper had done all his writing.

Their discovery on the scene of the murder of a very clever imitation of her hand enabled them immediately to narrow down their list of suspects to the two or three criminals they knew to combine murder with forgery, and then to concentrate upon him.

Had he written no note, he was safe. An excess of precaution had proved his undoing.

—*John L. Considine.*



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"Keep the news about this quiet. It might cause a panic!"

The Tell-Tale Drop of Blood

By Robert W. Sneddon

A Scientific Murder Unparalleled in the Annals of Crime—in Which a Germ of the Most Deadly Destroyer Known to the Human Race Testifies Against the Murderer

YOUNG Dr. Tallentrye settled down to his work in the air-cooled laboratory of the Calcutta Hospital. It was his job to examine the blood specimens taken from patients and—given the usual interval—to allow for the development of any germ. It was a routine job and he never looked for anything much in the cultures but a typhoid or similar germ.

He had passed a number of slides under the microscope before he came to one which caused him to frown and focus his eye more clearly at the eyepiece. He bit his lip and hesitated. It was hardly possible, yet he could take no chances. He called his assistant.

"Kindly ask Dr. Mathewson if he could step here a moment—it's something rather important."

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The elderly superintending surgeon came in a few minutes. "What's the trouble, Tallentrye? I'm rather busy this morning—"

"I'm sorry, sir, but I've just made rather a hideous discovery. Would you mind having a look at this slide?"

Dr. Mathewson bent over. He started back abruptly. "Good God—bubonic."

The two men looked at each other apprehensively. The drop of blood came from someone carrying the germ of the most deadly destroyer of life known to the human race. Unchecked, the bubonic plague in a week could wipe out the whole population of a good sized city. Were it to start in the narrow streets of the native quarters, down by the docks, no medical science could check it.

"I'll check this. Where did it come from?" said Mathewson.

"I'll find out—it's about ten days old."

"There's no doubt about it," said Mathewson when his laboratory man returned. "It's bubonic all right. What did you find in the files?"

"The blood came from a young man—Amarendra Nath Pandey. The first tests were negative. The death certificate gives the cause of death as septic pneumonia."

"Who certified the death?"

"Dr. Sivapada Bhattacharya. Shall I try and get hold of him?"

"No. Keep the news about this quiet. You know what would happen if it leaked out. It might cause a panic! They'd be dying like flies of fear. Keep it within these walls. Only we must get hold of the young man's relatives. Heaven only knows what they are carrying about with them."

It required quite a little diplomacy to get hold of relatives consisting of two aunts and two cousins, but they came to the hospital. The only one missing was the dead youth's half brother Benoyendra Nath Pandey, who was away on a holiday trip

"Funny time to take a holiday when he should be mourning," Dr. Mathewson commented gruffly. "Very odd. They're usually so pious about the business."

An aunt explained that by Amarendra's death Benoyendra had come into possession of his estate which he had been administering until he came of age. It was quite a fortune. Amarendra had been getting an income equivalent to ten thousand dollars a year and was also heir to capital bringing in a like sum. Benoyendra was sole heir to the dead youth.

Dr. Mathewson had these relatives examined. They were all in perfect health.

HE questioned them further about Amarendra. He had been a perfectly well young man until about three months earlier. Then he had suddenly developed a mysterious illness which attacked his jaw muscles and eyes. Benoyendra called in a doctor who did not seem to know what was wrong, so they called in their own family physician who said Amarendra had tetanus. His jaw was locked and he had convulsions. The doctor could not say how the bacillus had been absorbed but he found an abrasion of the skin on the bridge of the nose through which it was possible the germ might have entered the blood.

"What caused the wound on the nose?" asked Dr. Mathewson.

"A pair of sun glasses. They were a present from Benoyendra. When Benoyendra tried them on Amarendra's nose they did not sit properly so

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he pressed them down—and the metal bridge was all rough and it broke the skin and made it bleed."

"Quite so," Dr. Mathewson commented. A strange vague suspicion was creeping into his mind. "Tell me, who was this doctor Benoyendra called in?"

"Dr. Taranath Bhattacharya—the brother of doctor Sivapada."

"Indeed. And you say he did no good."

"No. He gave my nephew an injection and he got worse. But our own doctor took charge of the case and cured him."

"Did you happen to see those sun glasses, by any chance?"

"Yes. The edge of the bridge was all rough as if it had been cut. I don't know what became of the glasses—they disappeared."

"I'm not surprised," said Dr. Mathewson drily. "Now tell me about the last illness."

"Surely, *Sahib*. It came on so suddenly. We were doing some shopping. It was very hot but we thought nothing of it, only next day Amarendra could not rise from his bed. He was dizzy and sick. We sent for the doctor and he gave him some medicine. It did no good. His legs and arms began to swell, his flesh to blacken. Then we got a nurse from the hospital here and they took a specimen of his blood—word came back it said nothing. What suffering poor Amarendra endured. Benoyendra called in Dr. Sivapada Bhattacharya, but he could do nothing. In three days Amarendra was dead."

"Septic pneumonia, eh?" mused Dr. Mathewson.

How the devil had the bacillus of plague attacked Amarendra?

Four impassive faces stared at Dr. Mathewson. Suddenly one of them quickened to emotion. "*Sahib*, when we examined Amarendra the day of his sickness there was a strange puncture on his arm that might have been a bite—"

"Of a flea?"

"No, larger than that."

"Have you any idea how it got there?"

"No. Only that when we were with Amarendra that day we were standing and a man pushed past us roughly. He gave Amarendra a shove and all at once Amarendra cried out something had pricked him in the arm."

"What sort of a man?" Dr. Mathewson weighed his next words, "Not by any chance one of those doctors who attended your nephew?"

"Oh, no, *Sahib*. One we had never seen before. A street sweeper."

"H'm. Did the doctors see that mark on the arm?"

"Yes, but they said it was nothing."

"Very well, thank you. Now I want you to go home and say not a word to a single soul, not even to Benoyendra."

When they were gone Dr. Mathewson turned to Dr. Tallentrye: "I don't like the looks of it. I am very much afraid someone used a needle on the young man—"

"And injected the germ?"

"Precisely. It looks to me like a case for the police."

"Oh, but the body is burned!" Tallentrye objected.

"The murderer is still alive. Get me the Commissioner on the wire, or better still I'll go and see him myself."

II

THE British Police Commissioner shared Dr. Mathewson's opinion that the case might be one of murder and set a couple of his men on

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the job, one white, the other Sergeant Hassan Ali, a Moslem native.

The trail led to Benoyendra. This young man, who had been left an equal share of the estate, had been running through his part with lightning speed assisted by kind friends and a dancing girl whom he had taken out of the district given over to the ladies of the ancient and, in the East, highly honorable profession. He had settled her in a magnificent apartment and showered her with gifts.

Then apparently he had turned greedy eyes on Amarendra's share over the capital of which he had control until the youth came of age. Amarendra was devoted to the scapegrace, but when money for his education was not forthcoming he consulted a lawyer who advised him to ask for an accounting. This Amarendra, aided by his aunts, did. The demand threw a scare into his half brother who knew that if the case was brought to court he stood a good chance of going to prison for embezzlement.

It was immediately after this that Amarendra's health began to be attacked. There was the episode of the sun glasses, innocent in itself, but taken in connection with another germ infection, highly suspicious.

It certainly looked as if Benoyendra had secured expert advice on a cunning and effective way of disposing of his brother, thus at once forestalling legal trouble and acquiring a new fortune.

The Sergeant, unknown to Benoyendra, managed to make the acquaintance of the dancing girl, and from her he extracted enough information to cause him to concentrate his investigation on the dissipated Benoyendra.

He finally struck up his acquaintance, representing himself to be a salesman, coming to an admission that he peddled drugs and had no scruples about taking a life or two. In fact he confided to Benoyendra the details of a couple of clever murders which had gone undetected. The trick worked. One night when Benoyendra had taken too much to drink he began to boast.

He too had carried through a crime which the police, try all they wanted to, could never pin to him. The victim's body was burned. The last ash of suspicion by this time vanished.

Hassan Ali led the boaster on, baiting him with the assertion that he was just talking for effect, and the drunken Hindu revealed the whole hideous scheme suggested to him by his medical friend, Dr. Taranath Bhattacharya. It was the doctor who supplied the tetanus germs used on the sun glasses. It would be a murder which would have every appearance of a natural death.

When it failed the doctor thought of plague germs. They were harder to obtain. Every application was met with the statement that he was welcome to experiment with the germs but only in the laboratories under observation. However, he was successful in getting a tube from a Bombay hospital by making false representations.

The pair then hired the actual killer and sent him out with a hypodermic syringe charged with the death germs. This man trailed Amarendra and at the first chance jammed the needle into his arm and jabbed the plunger down. When he withdrew the needle and fled, his victim was marked for death.

BENOYENDRA, in his smart European clothes, lifted heavy eyes to read the admiration of his cleverness in his friend's face. But he was surprised at the change which had come over him.

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"What's wrong?" he faltered.

"Everything," said the Sergeant grimly. "I am Sergeant Hassan Ali, of the detective service of the police, and you have just admitted to me the murder of your half brother Amarendra Nath Pandey. You are under arrest, Benoyendra Nath Pandey."

Benoyendra turned livid, then he smiled crookedly. "Without a body there is no murder, so says the law of the English and did I not myself crack the calcined skull of Amarendra to release his soul. Where is Amarendra to bear witness against me?"

"Amarendra will bear witness when the time comes," said the Sergeant composedly.

"You told me you were a knave, but you did not tell me you were a fool. I tell you there is nothing of Amarendra, nothing left."

"It is you who are the fool, afflicted of Allah, and a boaster. For lo, the doctors have a drop of Amarendra's blood to proclaim your guilt as surely as if it were attested to by a hundred witnesses. Let that thought trouble your sleep tonight. Come, hurry, most clever one."

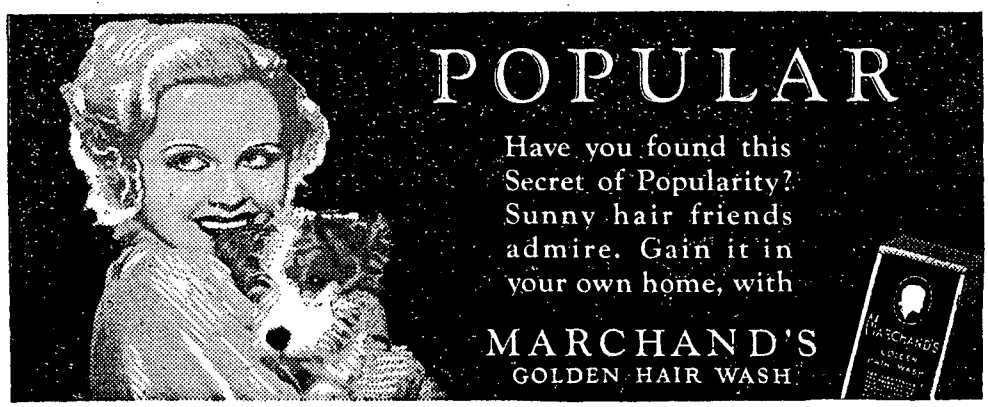
Arrests were made swiftly of the two doctors Bhattacharya, and Dr. Dhar who had also attended the murdered youth. The street sweeper could not be found.

The trial of the quartette which opened early last year in Alipur, suburb of Calcutta, was, without a doubt, one of the most sensational ever held in India.

The prosecutor, N. N. Banerjee, declared that the plot to do away with the dead youth was a well-planned scientific design, unparalleled in the annals of crime. The story of brother taking the life of brother for the sake of a patrimony was an ancient and universal one, but to employ bacteriological culture as a means to this end was an act of diabolic ingenuity.

The plague germs were traced to Dr. Taranath who had obtained them from the Corporation Hospital in Bombay through a letter alleged to have been provided by Dr. Sivapada. This last had, it was charged, knowing that Amarendra had been infected, given a false certificate on the basis of which the body had been removed at once to the ghats and cremated.

Dr. Dhar and Dr. Sivapada were acquitted. Dr. Taranath Bhattacharya was sentenced to life imprisonment, and the Hindu imitator of the crime of Cain, Benoyendra Nath Pandey, expiated his crime on the gallows.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Seven Faces

"The trail goes on across the meadow," said O'Rourke. "I wish you had a gun. I'd like company on this little walk."

By Max Brand

What has happened—

JOHN COBB, the eccentric multimillionaire, is afraid for his life, so badly frightened, in fact, that he asks for police protection during his flight to Chicago. Detectives Patrick O'Rourke and Angus Campbell have to go to Chicago anyway to testify in the Rand-Weston case, and they are assigned the job of guarding Cobb. Cobb is almost insane with terror, sees enemies in all those about him on the train, especially a beautiful girl named Josephine Worth and a man named Charles Latimer. Latimer and the girl have struck up a sudden acquaintanceship after she received a mysterious, shocking telegram.

One of Cobb's first acts is to draw up a will, conveying all his wealth to a cousin, Lawrence Purvis Pelton. The detectives witness the document, and leave, agreeing to return every half hour.

John Cobb, Fleeing for His Life, Finds That Even Guardians like Detectives O'Rourke and Campbell Cannot Outwit That Old Demon, Death

In the meanwhile a bearded, foreign-looking man named Al Grosvenor forces his way into Cobb's stateroom. The multimillionaire nearly collapses. It is obvious that Grosvenor's appearance is at least part of what he was fearing. He offers the confidence man ten million dollars, and the two begin some strange, unusual plot.

A few minutes later O'Rourke goes to look in on Cobb. There is no answer when he knocks. Latimer, who is passing through the aisle, breaks the door down. The stateroom is empty. A bottle which had con-

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tained chloroform, is on the floor. The window is open, and a rope, anchored to the car roof, is dangling outside.

O'Rourke is sure that by getting off the train at the next stop, Bingham, and tracing back to where the train made a short stop, outside Fullerton, he can solve the disappearance. Campbell is just as certain that by staying on the train and checking the passengers, he can break the mystery.

"You stick on the train and I'll go off and find Cobb," O'Rourke jibed.

"Go and be damned," Campbell answered. "The murderer is on the train."

CHAPTER VI

The Man in the Alcove

THE train slowed for Bingham and waited there panting, for two full minutes before the checkup was completed. The conductor reported to the two detectives: "There's not a soul missing. We've waked up everybody on the train and been damned for it. Everyone's aboard."

O'Rourke turned up the collar of his overcoat before stepping down into the drive of the rain. He grinned vastly around his cigar at Campbell.

"You get the goose-egg, brother," he said.

"If nobody's left the train," said Campbell, his eyes glittering, "that means that the chloroformer is still on it. Go wade in the mud, O'Rourke. I'll stay here on the train and find the crook between drinks. . . . Have a good time. It's what you're meant for, you bog-jumper!"

The calm superiority of O'Rourke was damaged by that last word. He almost dropped the cigar from his mouth as he started to shout an answer. But since the train was already beginning to move stealthily, he changed his mind and lurched from the last step down to the platform. He grabbed the suitcase which was shoved after him and then ducked his head against the whistling force of the rain.

Over him ran the lights of the train, slowly, then in a rapid blur. The last platform whished past before he had started to walk to the little stationhouse.

By the time he reached it, the next bend had eaten up the long line of the sleepers and the brightness of the lounge car at the end of the train.

The stationhouse was empty, dark, blind. O'Rourke stood in the lee of it, listening to the crash of the rain and watching the wet billows of wind that swept around the corner of the building between him and the lights of the town. There were enough of them to show the main street, sleek and black. He shrugged the coat up until his shoulders were snug in it, then he advanced into the storm. By the time he got to the garage, the walk had warmed him and the edge was gone from the wind.

The night-man came in high rubber boots with a dripping sponge in his hand. He said: "Yeah?" His young face was frowning.

"Who you got can drive me to Fullerton?" asked O'Rourke.

"Nobody," said the night-man.

"What's your name?"

"McGuire."

"Sure!" said O'Rourke. "I knew you were Irish."

"I'm half German and a quarter Welsh and an eighth French," said McGuire, beginning to turn away.

"Listen, brother," said O'Rourke, "Irish is the oil. No matter what you mix it with, it comes to the top. . . ."

McGuire laughed. "Yeah? All right," he said. "Maybe."

"I'm O'Rourke," he went on.

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"From the headquarters force in New York."

"The hell you are!"

"Yeah, badge and gun and everything. Wanta see them? How much to take me to Fullerton?"

"And get canned in the morning for leaving the job?"

"You couldn't help it. The damned cop made you go."

"Made me?" scowled McGuire. Then he laughed the frown out of his face. "All right. You made me go. Twenty bucks?" he added, speculatively.

"Twenty dollars!" grunted O'Rourke. But he answered: "Well, the city's rich. . . . You know the country all around Fullerton?"

"Do I know the palm of my hand?"

"You know the palm of your hand when there's twenty bucks in it," said O'Rourke. "Come on, brother. Let's make a start."

"Requisition that big sedan over there, for us," suggested McGuire.

"I've already requisitioned it, in the name of the law," grinned O'Rourke. "Let's climb."

The rain smashed the windshield a dusty white with a volley of water as they lurched into the street. The double windshield wipers clicked hurriedly back and forth as the engine raced. Through a pale cone of light they felt their way down the street, a million crystal pencilings slashing across the radiance. They left the street lamps and turned into the emptiness of the open country.

"The station at Fullerton," said O'Rourke. "Just below the station, where there's a couple of stacks of ties corded up."

Distance covered in a train seems a thing that an automobile never will get over, just as distance in an automobile seems something that walking cannot possibly traverse; but they got down to Fullerton with a smooth sliding of the big car all the way. Small pools of water kept dashing into spray that rang on the fenders and made muddy clouds across the windshield glass, but McGuire knew his way and got there. At the appointed place, he stopped, snapped on a searchlight, and turned its strong shaft slowly across two piles of ties, all tarred and stacked and ready for using.

O'ROURKE got out and walked down the tall railroad fence, wondering how much it cost by the rod to fence a double way from New York to Chicago. He did not arrive at figures. He preferred merely to wonder. He crawled through between the rails and began to sweep the ground with his electric torch. A spilling of oil, running blue-green in the rain-water, showed him, he thought, where the engine must have stopped. He measured off an approximate distance to the point where the car of John Cobb might have been in the procession. There he began to scan the ground more carefully. Packed cinders do not compress any more easily wet than dry, but in the soft of the ground off the railbed, he found tracks. The heel-marks sank well in. Grass grew here. Close to the fence, the grass was smeared down. It was still springing up as it might have done if a body had been flung down there an hour or so before—flung down and then dragged under the fence.

Here McGuire turned around and looked back towards the rails, conjuring up the picture that had risen in his eyes of a single man carrying a limp weight out from under the staring eyes of light that shone from the train,

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throwing the weight down here, dragging it calmly under the fence. To be sure, the rain must have obscured everything. Or perhaps the fellow had paused behind the stack of ties. No, there was no confusion of footmarks there. He had gone straight on, defying the eyes of the train. At a certain point in any crime, there is a moment when the criminal shows a queer courage, but in this crime he had been brave all the way through. Whether he had acted in coöperation with a confederate inside the train, as Campbell thought, or had worked the entire trick from the outside, by means of that dangling, perilous rope, the fellow had been a hero throughout.

It was not the force of the wind or the rushing weight of the rain that made O'Rourke shiver a little. . . .

He crawled through the bars of the fence again, on the trail. It crossed the road through the headlight flung from the waiting car and entered the grass of the field beyond. Stones had been pulled from the top of the fence. They lay inside. He could tell that they had fallen recently because their undersides were less dark-colored than the weathered old veterans which topped the wall on either side.

Another thing made O'Rourke stoop with his lantern: on the grass there was sign that a body had fallen here with great weight. It brought into his eyes a picture of an unconscious form dragged by the heels, the head and shoulders allowed to drop brutally, from the height of the fence to the ground.

If that were the case, John Cobb was dead by this time. Kidnapers cherish their victims; they don't drag them to death.

Why, then, had not Cobb been murdered on the train? Why that frantic desire to get him living from the stateroom and out across country?

O'Rourke breathing of the mystery, put back his head and regarded the rain which was slashing into his face.

"McGuire!" he called.

The tall fellow came running to him.

"You see this?" said O'Rourke. He pointed his light down on the beaten and dragged grass.

"Yeah. I see."

"The trail goes on across the meadow," said O'Rourke. "I wish you had a gun. I'd like you for company on this little walk."

"I don't need a gun," said McGuire. "I'll go along."

"Your car is gonna get terribly wet . . . Maybe this is a dead body that's being dragged through the grass, McGuire . . . And that car sure is getting wet."

"Damn the car!" said McGuire.

"The Irish is like oil," murmured O'Rourke. "It comes right to the top."

McGuire ran back to the car, snapped off the strong headlights and put on the meager parking lamps. Then he hurried up to O'Rourke. He was a big-striding fellow, and the tails of his overcoat flapped and snapped around his knees. O'Rourke deliberately put the hand torch straight upon him. The wet, stiff crop of unshaven hair glistened on the face of McGuire. The greasy swipes on his face, which made him seem older, could not disguise the fact, now, that he was hardly more than twenty. The grease on his face and his eyes shone with the same brightness. He had a rounded mug of a face with plenty of bone in the wide jaw.

"I've got something in a pinch," he said, and showed a heavy monkey-wrench. "If I chuck this into the middle of some guy, it sure is gonna

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mixt up his works for him. He'll stop ticking for a while."

McGuire laughed and brandished the monkey-wrench. "'Let's go!" he said. "It's not doing nothing that gets a guy down. Leave us see where this jerry was going, anyway."

THE trail was easily followed. That weight which the man had carried from the train appeared to be too great to consider carrying any longer. It was dragged on straight across the grass. The wet of that grass ought to have roused a chloroformed victim from unconsciousness by this time, thought O'Rourke, but now he found the ground descending into a small, sandy gulch with streaks and small pools of water standing in it. The weight had been pulled down one side of this minute ravine and through the middle of a shallow pool, and up the farther side. O'Rourke, when he reached the opposite bank, looked back with his light at the distinctly marked trail.

"Yeah," said McGuire, "think of that devil! Was the guy dead that he was hauling?"

"I dunno," answered O'Rourke.

There were woods before them, naked, dreary, pulling darkness around them from the black earth and the dingy sky. It was a two-power flashlight that he carried, and now O'Rourke turned on the dimmer. Even this he used only from time to time, for they had established the line of flight, and only needed to check it occasionally.

"Suppose that louse is hiding away and taking a peek at us as we come along?" asked McGuire.

"Yeah. Suppose," agreed O'Rourke.

The rain turned to a gusty drizzling, after a moment. When they were inside the trees, the storm ceased altogether, and through the naked branches O'Rourke saw the clouds breaking away into massive ranges and mountainous islands that sailed down the sky. The stars looked quietly through from behind.

Still with the dimmer globe of the flashlight, O'Rourke led the way. He said: "You scatter out to the side, McGuire. Supposing he was to let loose, why should he get two birds with one bullet?"

"Yeah, supposing," echoed McGuire, and kept on at his side.

The woods cleared. In the clearing stood a little summer alcove. It could not be called a summer-house, because it was not roofed. The hedge and the wattled wall enclosed a small space and the trail of the dragged weight led directly into the entrance. O'Rourke hesitated half a moment. Then he walked straight in, with McGuire crowding his shoulder in eagerness not to be last.

The furniture of the little summer alcove consisted of green painted iron chairs around an iron table. In one of the chairs sat a lumpish black thing that looked more like a mud image than a man. Fire had melted it out of shape or recognition. All the ground beneath its feet was black; and the strong wires were visible that had bound the body in the chair, motionless A single feature could be made out: the gape of the mouth, distended by a gag.

CHAPTER VII

Seven Faces

AFTER a moment, McGuire turned and stumbled out of the place. O'Rourke listened to the retching. He kept on scanning the floor of

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the summer-alcove, for the ground was soft and footmarks were everywhere. But except for one line of easily distinguishable tracks that led straight up to the chair, the rest were muffled pads, and he knew that the murderer had wrapped his feet in rags as he moved about the place.

A glint of metal in the horrible scorched blackness of the lap of the dead had the eye of O'Rourke, now. He picked up a thin platinum watch, flaked over with carbon that shook away at once and left the metal almost as pure as though it had just come from a jeweler's case. When he pried the back open he read, inside: "To John Cobb, from Larry, Bill, and Joe."

Lawrence Purvis Pelton, that first name would mean, perhaps. Well, Larry would be getting a return for this present, before long.

O'Rourke sat down in one of the green painted chairs and lighted a cigar. McGuire came in, green-yellow of face, scowling to keep his courage high.

"Sit down," said ORourke.

"I'll stand up . . . and walk around."

"You'll do no damn thing of the kind," insisted O'Rourke. "What's written on the floor may be the last chapter of the book of this crime. Sit down. Have a cigar."

"No!" McGuire refused hastily.

"You're young," said O'Rourke. A shower of rain blew out of nowhere, for all overhead seemed starry and bright. "You're young, and you can't take it. The day'll come when this sort of stuff won't mean nothing. You'll take it easy. This here is a grouch and a grudge murder. Or else, maybe it's something else, again. Tell me about the folks around here."

"They're all a high-hat crowd," said McGuire, sitting stiffly on the edge of his chair and fingering his monkey-wrench nervously.

"Like who?" asked O'Rourke.

"The Cray's, and the Loftus family, and the Ginnis crowd—they are pretty new—and the Willoughbys, and John Cobb has some ground that begins a half mile off and . . ."

"Leave off at John Cobb," said O'Rourke. "What sort of a man is he?"

"He's a scrawny kind of a mean guy," said McGuire. "He's a nut."

"How come?"

"He's got millions, but he lives in a little house and does his own work."

"His own work?"

"It's a little house and has a lot of stunts in it that work by electricity. He does his own laundry, even, partly. The wool socks and all that. He's just a nut. And mean."

"A millionaire that don't get no fun? I've seen that kind. Mostly half of them are that kind. They dunno what to do. The fun with money is wanting to do something and being scared of going broke. They can't go broke, so they don't have no fun. Cobb must have some friends for neighbors, though?"

"I never heard of none."

O'Rourke puffed thoughtfully and stared at the blackened and formless body.

"Comes up here, rapped on the head—likely—wired into the chair. Gasoline or kerosene poured over him. Lighted . . . I read in a book where they used to do that in Rome, in the old days."

"Mussolini?" asked McGuire.

"Aw, hell no! A long ways back—you oughta study your history, kid; it does a lot for a guy—back when they had martyrs. They'd wrap 'em up and

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soak 'em in oil and when Nero wanted to give a bang-up party, he'd have the martyrs lighted and the yelling they done was the music that Nero ate to. He got fat on it. . . . The guy that murdered Cobb, he maybe was a reader."

"Cobb?" cried McGuire.

"I guess it's John Cobb," said O'Rourke, pointing to the watch. "There's one part of his name that wasn't burned up, even if the glass of the watch cracked. Funny thing, McGuire, how the fire kind of burned off the rough edges and turned him into black dough, ain't it?"

"Yeah . . . funny," choked McGuire.

"No friends you know about?"

"Nobody I know. He . . . is *that* millionaire John Cobb?" asked the boy again.

"Maybe not," said O'Rourke. "One of the big wheezes, these days, is to give your man a ride and then burn him so's nobody'll know about him."

HE stood up and leaned over the dead body again. "But there's some dental work in his mug that'll help to identify him," explained O'Rourke. "It's a wonderful thing how a dentist can be useful, outside of his working hours. Where's Cobb's house?"

"Back down behind the woods, a little way."

"Did Cobb own these woods, here?"

"They all put in and owned them. They all put in and bought them when Jefferson Craig died, a year or two back."

"They take him off the train," O'Rourke mused aloud, "and they drag him up here. Why? So's to be done with him, fenced in by trees. Know that Cobb's to die. They hardly care whether they kill him or not, on the way. But want to get something out of him before he kicks off. Wire him into the chair. Leave one hand free to make signatures, perhaps? I wonder about that . . . Signatures. . . . Anyway, in the windup, gasoline over the body. Then a match thrown on it. . . . The flame booms. It explodes. After the first rush of the fire, there's our friend, John Cobb, sitting in a welter of the fire and his hair blazin' up like a torch. More gasoline thrown on, maybe, to freshen the flames a good bit. Then the fire burns down, and the job is done. The face of John Cobb has been wiped away. The rain comes bucketing down. And there you are! Neat, McGuire, ain't it?"

McGuire said nothing. It was possible for him to look at the dreadful, gaping, faceless body, but it was not possible for him to utter a sound.

O'Rourke shifting his cigar to one side of his mouth, crouched on the floor and began to hum as he made a tracing of two of the footprints on the floor of the alcove. He stood up and hummed quietly on with the same monotonous tune.

"Now we start for the Cobb house," he said, "if you'll show me the way, McGuire."

McGuire nodded, and rose hastily to leave, but O'Rourke at the entrance to the alcove felt not the clayey loam underfoot but the gritting of sand. He took a kick at it, for it lay in a little mound, but it concealed nothing, apparently. So he went on behind McGuire.

The flashlight showed them their way through the woods. It was largely of birches, and their trunks flashed as white as chalk.

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"It's ghostly, damned if it ain't," said McGuire, gripping his monkey-wrench hard.

"Yeah," said O'Rourke, stumbling over an exposed root, "whenever there's been a dead man in your eye, it keeps you thinking for a few minutes afterwards. It's funny, that way. I dunno why."

McGuire looked at him so hard that he stumbled in his turn. They came out from the woods on to a winding path that led to a road, and by the starlight O'Rourke could see the big houses that sat far back from the highway, swelling fronts, avenues and cloudy groves of trees.

"All kind of high-hat, eh?" said O'Rourke.

"High as hell," agreed McGuire. "Here's the entrance to Cobb's place. . . . Mr. O'Rourke, was it him, back there, you think?"

"I guess it was him, all right," said O'Rourke, "but I won't be sure till the dentist has a look."

They turned into the driveway, for the panels of the iron gate were open. It was almost half a mile to the house. When O'Rourke saw it, he said: "A hundred thousand dollars' worth of land and a two thousand dollar shack on it!"

He looked across the easy slope and down to the shadowy Hudson which took a bend, here, big and still as a lake.

"The house ain't big, but they say that he spent fifty thousand on it," said McGuire.

"Newspaper dollars," said O'Rourke. "How could you get fifty thousand bucks into a dump the size of that unless you stuck a lot of gold leaf on the walls?"

"How'll we get in?" asked McGuire. "You gotta key?"

"We'll get in, all right," said O'Rourke. And he laughed a little.

He tried the front and back door, first, as a matter of course. Both were locked. There was no shed, no barn, no outhouse of any sort near the little building. The doors and windows were small.

It was like a section of a ship, stuck up here on the top of the slope like a lookout.

Perhaps that was what it was — a lookout! O'Rourke registered the idea in his mind for future reference.

He tried windows, after that, but they were fast, every one, and nothing but great force could pry them up. He had to pick up a rock and shatter a pane before he could reach up and turn the catch. Then he pushed up the window slowly and leaned into the interior, for the sill was surprisingly close to the ground. His flashlight showed him a small dining room, the furniture old mahogany, the walls paneled with dark carved wood. The whole room had a satiny gleam of care and richness.

"Yeah . . . maybe fifty thousand . . . Jeez!" said O'Rourke, and climbed through the window. McGuire followed him. When O'Rourke turned the electric switch, the room shone with light from four small wall-brackets; at the same time a horrible clamor of alarm-bells made McGuire jump.

"Burglar alarms and everything," grinned O'Rourke, turning off the switch.

But the racket continued and seemed to grow.

"Let's get out of here," suggested McGuire.

"It's only some noise. Nobody can hear it on the road," said O'Rourke. "How does noise make any difference?"

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HE pushed through to the next room, which was the kitchen. It was as small as a galley on a boat and as conveniently arranged. White tiles covered the walls to the ceiling. The electric stove was white-tiled, also; the whole room had an arctic glare like snow. Several wires were plugged into one big fixture in a corner. O'Rourke tried them one by one and finally pulled out one that silenced the alarm. The silence began to walk in upon them by degrees. McGuire could breathe again.

"Lookat!" he said. "There's the electric washing machine. There's the slot window that lets the clothes line run outside into the sun. Vacuum cleaner, floor polisher, everything electric and all handy."

"Yeah. Fifty thousand bucks, maybe," said O'Rourke. "It's funny, ain't it? Living up here like a bird on a damn branch so's the hawks couldn't come near to him!"

He went on into a living room-library with the same low ceiling that closed the other rooms of the house. The big fireplace filled almost the entire end of the chamber. Book cases filled every other wall space. O'Rourke walked slowly past them. The great majority were detective stories and serious books on crime and criminals. There were, also, a few volumes on minerology; nothing else was on the shelves.

It was a very bright, cheery room, the floor overlaid from end to end with Persian rugs which were not fitted side by side, but overlapped in a luxurious confusion and gave the floor a wavering, uneven level.

O'Rourke pushed on to the fourth and last room of the little house. It was the largest of all, this bedchamber, with the bed fitted into a wall alcove so that it projected hardly at all into the floor space. Another big fireplace insured the winter comfort of John Cobb. Between this and the bathroom there was an enlarged closet, or dressing room, with one small, high window. Light, cloth-covered doors kept the series of clothes poles from dust. John Cobb was a fellow who thought a good deal of his appearance. There must have been fifty or sixty suits for all occasions; but what O'Rourke reached for was a pair of tan shoes on the high rack which contained so many. He studied them with care, for a moment, and then drew from his pocket the outlines he had made of the tracks in the summer alcove among the trees. When he fitted the shoes over these impressions they were in exact accord. The heel was of just the right breadth and depth, the toe-curve was precisely the same.

"Yeah," said O'Rourke, rising from his knees, "that was John Cobb that burned to death in that chair. . . ."

"Why?" wondered McGuire. "He never done nothing to nobody around here."

"There's fifteen million reasons why," said O'Rourke.

He stood back and glanced around the room. There was one very odd, distinguishing feature of the place, and that was the series of large photographs attached to the cloth coverings of the closet doors. There were seven of these doors and on each was affixed a big picture of a man. The dearest friends or associates of John Cobb, no doubt.

"But you wouldn't think," said O'Rourke, "that a lonely mug like this fellow would care that much about his pals, would you?"

"He didn't care nothing about people," said McGuire.

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"How d'you know that?" asked O'Rourke.

"Me? Oh, I've seen his face; I've seen him with people. They didn't matter to him."

"We'll go down to the cellar and the garage," said O'Rourke. "But if these ain't his friends, why would he have their pictures around?"

Here his eye stopped on one of the portraits. It was of a lad of twenty, perhaps, a big fellow in a flannel shirt open at the throat, with a shadow of unshaven whiskers on his face. The likeness was excellent, and O'Rourke recognized instantly the face of Charles Latimer!.

CHAPTER VIII

One of the Hunted!

ANGUS CAMPBELL took his thin face and his ferret's eye into the stateroom from which the passenger had disappeared so mysteriously. In it was coiled the entire length of the rope which had been dangling outside the window, and this rope he now passed and repassed through his hands, thoughtfully, often pausing to look again at the three-pronged grappling iron at the end of the length. The grapple was made of the finest steel, drawn to points exquisitely fine. A three-taloned claw like this would have fixed its foot at the first grasp on a surface of sheer, polished granite. Easily it would bite into the metal roof of the car. It could be thrown up from the ground and, the moment it caught hold, the weight of a man's body as he climbed up the side of the car would be ample to work the sharp teeth into the steel above for a secure hold. This much was explained, therefore. And he felt that he had in his hands one of the fundamentals of the crime, because it was his experience that the fundamentals always are simple things. If you have the dagger that killed the king, the rest ought to be fairly easy. By this rope, felt Campbell, he might draw the criminal to the electric chair, while O'Rourke, like the fat-headed Irish fool that he was, blundered through rain and mud on a trail that had no meaning.

Campbell, at this point, drew a deep breath of relief, and drew from his pocket a little round reading glass that magnified a number of times. With this he started to go over the stateroom inch by inch. He had neither hope nor doubt, as he worked. His chief concern was to move as little as possible so that sign of Campbell would not complicate the other sign in the stateroom. Into it had come, so far as he knew, O'Rourke, the porter, that big Charles Latimer, the vanished man from the stateroom, and Campbell.

Too many people, thought Campbell, as he dropped on his knees and surveyed the floor. He found there some large dabs of cigar ashes, one of them half an inch long and almost perfectly intact. One of O'Rourke's cigars, of course. And yet O'Rourke had not been in the stateroom any great length of time, which made the presence of that ash rather a mystery. He found the butt end of a cigar, a considerable section bitten off with great force which had squashed the soft of the tobacco leaf together. This small treasure, Campbell wrapped in a little twist of paper and put into a vest pocket. Yonder there was a considerable gray smear of the cigar ashes and in it remained fairly clearly the print of the foot which had spread the mark. The shoe had a delicately pointed tip. It was a woman's shoe that must have made the mark.

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Here Campbell sat back on his heels and grunted softly. For his spirit was being fed. No woman, so far as he knew, could have entered the stateroom, yet the sign was there, as clear as a photograph and a signed confession of her presence

He rocked forward to examine the mark again. The heel print was not close to the mark of the toe, which indicated one of two things—either that she was a very large woman or that she wore low heels. Campbell traced the imprint very much as O'Rourke, not very much later, was to trace the mark of the man's shoe in that summer alcove.

When this had been done with accuracy, Campbell continued his laborious examination of the floor of the stateroom. He even picked up and preserved in his twist of thin paper, several hairs which he discovered. His search now climbed to the seats.

People leave different marks on plush. Men sit with their legs at different angles; their weight depresses the plush nap more or less; and sometimes minute particles of the cloth from their trousers may be recovered. But though Campbell squinted from one side and then from another, he gained nothing at all assured as testimony. He swung his notice now to the walls. On the merest suggestion of a rough splinter-base near the door, shoulder high, he discovered a very fine white thread—a spider thread, no more. But that, no doubt, was where the porter had rubbed against the wall.

He imprisoned that thread in one of his paper twists. It meant nothing, perhaps. Indeed, single things are not apt to have much meaning, but when four or five of the insignificant details are laid side by side, they begin to make sense.

Continuing to the windows, he discovered one of the screws of the window frame had worked loose, slightly. Just enough to catch under the sharp edge of its head a little tuft of brownish thread. Campbell rolled it into a thread. A brownish thread such as might have come out of the fabric of a loosely woven tweed.

That was when he remembered big Charles Latimer, huge Charles Latimer who had battered in the door with the massive weight of his shoulder.

Yet Latimer, so far as he knew, had not sat down on one of the seats. Instead, he had still been on the move until the stateroom was cleared out by the detectives. No person, standing, could have rubbed away that little airy tuft of material. It was impossible. Campbell, taking his place on the seat, made sure that the screw which had detached the scrap of thread was actually higher than his own shoulder. He had to raise himself three inches to bring his shoulder in line. Then he rubbed his shoulder forward across the screw-head.

From his own gray tweed coat, nothing detached. It was a much larger man than he who had sat there, a bulky, ponderous man whose body-movements had mass behind them. The more he thought of it, the more certain it was that the fellow must be Charles Latimer, who had been so readily at hand when O'Rourke wanted that door broken down. . . .

CAMPBELL, having completed his examination as far as the suitcases stacked in the racks above the seats, relaxed and sat down for a smoke. He needed the soothing breath of tobacco, now, and he drew down the smoke deep into his narrow lungs. The suitcases could wait until the end

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of the trip. In Chicago he would go through them in detail, bit by bit, with whatever legal examiner might be assigned to the case. Besides, in the disappearance of the passenger, this luggage probably was of no importance. Otherwise the essential part of it would have been taken along. For the brain which had conceived and executed this work, Campbell was sure, was a masterful intelligence incapable of overlooking important details.

However, such things as little tufts of cloth scraped off on the head of a screw may be magnified into the ropes which hang the guilty.

He left the stateroom and went back to the lounge-car. Most people had gone to bed, by this time. Four men sat in at a resolved rubber of bridge. The wife of one of them had come in to deal a few icy words to her husband; and he was accepting them with his jaws hard set, his cigar raking at an upward angle, his endurance near the breaking point.

Also, in the lounge, big Charles Latimer sat talking with that incredibly lovely girl; and there was the tall man with the black beard and the full, red mouth and the eyebrows arched in eternal surprise. Two others, sleepily finishing drinks and reading, made up the list in the lounge car. The detective left them and went back down the train. He roused each porter in turn, as he entered the cars, to ask briefly:

"Got a big man, around thirty years, brownish tweed suit; damn big over all; smiling sort of a fellow?"

At last he found the right porter, who declared that Charles Latimer had a compartment in that car. A glimpse of the detective's badge roused the porter past yawning. His frightened eyes rolled sidewise as he fitted the key into the door and opened the compartment; and Campbell waved him out and surveyed the scene when he was left alone. On the wall hung a huge raincoat with a buttoned-in fleece lining. The only bag was a massive pigskin affair, well battered and time-worn. He opened it and slipped a tentative hand down among the clothes until his fingertips touched metal. He passed his left hand down, lifted the clothes, and drew out a work-size forty-five caliber Colt. Campbell fingered it with the loving care of a connoisseur before he replaced it, making sure that it fitted exactly into the niche which its weight had hollowed out among the clothes. After that, he left the compartment and the wide-eyed porter.

He returned to the lounge car and ordered a Scotch, neat. Why good whiskey should be qualified with water or siphon he never had been able to understand; its strength was its beauty and a man who knew how to sip could make the drink last even longer than with an addition of seltzer. Campbell was one who knew how to sip.

The beautiful girl and Charles Latimer were the objects of his sidelong regard, for some time, until he made sure that she was wearing low heels, which set well back from the toes of her shoes and made her slender feet seem rather long. It was by no means a complete system of observations and deductions, but it was enough to assure Campbell that the girl had been in the stateroom before the kidnaping.

The girl, and Charles Latimer. Both had been there, perhaps at the same time. He had the strength to handle a slender fellow like the missing man; he could have thrown Cobb out the window like a ball. And the cold, calm profile of the girl, hardly warmed by

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her smiling, told Campbell that she might be capable of almost anything. He knew our Twentieth Century women by heart, he told himself. Whatever men would do, the woman might attempt also.

The big fellow with the red mouth and the black beard was lighting a fresh cigar, turning it slowly between his lips with one hand while with half-closed eyes he puffed, drawing the flame from the match. An odor of a peculiar rankness reached the nostrils of Campbell and he was so irritated that he went out on the platform at the end of the lounge car and watched the stars like sparks whirling in from the two horizons, and the dark of the trees on one side drawing towards the gleam of the river on the other. The shrill of the wind blew a flute note beside his ears; the clicking of the wheels kept up a broken rhythm under the train, a sort of crazy, conversational muttering.

Absently he fumbled at the little twists of paper in his vest pocket, The biggest pinch of all was the fragment which had been bitten from the butt of the cigar. He took this out, cut it in two, impaled it on the end of his pocket-knife, and held the flame of his cigarette lighter to it, until the tobacco glowed. Afterwards he inhaled the fumes; and the heart of Campbell sickened in him, then leaped away in a rioting joy of speculation. For he had recognized, beyond a doubt, the same odor which had driven him impatiently from the lounge car. He flicked the bit of cigar from the blade of the knife, closed it with a snap, and sauntered back into the car.

"Different, eh?" said Campbell, pausing beside the chair of Aloysius Grosvenor. "Not the kind of cigars that most people smoke, eh?"

GROSVENOR looked up and smiled first at Campbell and then at the ash which was forming at the end of his smoke, a light gray ringed with dark circles. Campbell, also, was studying that ash with a hungry interest.

"I import 'em from Porto Rico," lied Grosvenor. "You got to have a taste to enjoy 'em. You got to have real taste. . . . Try one?"

"Thanks," said Campbell, gratefully. "I'll try it after dinner tomorrow. Thanks very much."

He strolled back onto the platform at the end of the train and watched the whirling stars again.

He could not help thinking of O'Rourke, off there in the darkness, in the mud, following his nose to confusion like the Irish idiot that he was. O'Rourke, complacent, self-contented, at ease with himself, already thinking up smart-cracks to pass along to Corrigan at the end of this case. But the real mystery, Campbell knew, accompanied him upon this train.

No wonder that the cigar-smoker and Latimer and the girl were all in the lounge car. No wonder at all, because it began to come to Campbell that all three of them were working together.

The more he brooded upon the thing, the more real it was to him. Not one of the three was a usual type. And criminals who plotted the kidnaping of a person as wealthy as John Cobb were sure to be out of the ordinary run. Let O'Rourke do something for his half of the job and he, Campbell, would guarantee to work out the other portion on the train. At last they might emerge with truth perfect and whole, like the fitted halves of an apple.

He was cutting out a portion of the butt of Grosvenor's cigar, as he passed

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these thoughts through his mind. Just as he had lighted the other fragment, so he lighted this on the end of his knife-blade, and ignited it with a touch of flame. Afterwards he inhaled the foul aroma with more pleasure than any connoisseur ever felt when breathing of the most exquisite bouquet of some rare old Burgundy, or an exquisitely ripened vintage of the Rhine.

For it told him, definitely, that Grosvenor had dropped that cigar-butt in the stateroom of John Cobb. The whole thing was welding together. The girl, too pretty to be true, big Charles Latimer with the gun in his case, and yonder red-lipped cigar-smoker — all were working together as a closed corporation. They had seen to it that the helpless, chloroformed body of Cobb was passed out the window of the stateroom to confederates posted outside. The thing was as clear as pure glass. It was perfect.

As he snapped the glowing bit of tobacco from the knife end into the dark, where the wind streaked away into a straight gleaming line, Campbell felt something behind him. No one had come through the door since he stepped onto the platform and yet he felt an essence, as it were, standing immediately behind him, casting a chill of danger into the air.

He wondered, suddenly, why more people had not been tapped over the head and dropped on the rails from the observation platform of a train. All token of the blow would be rubbed out by the smashing force of the fall, of course.

Campbell turned suddenly and saw through the glass of the door the foreign face of the man with the black beard and the red lips. The naïve bend of the brows seemed at that moment the arch malice of a superior fiend and the eyes seemed to Campbell dangerous fires.

Aloysius Grosvenor turned away and strolled back to his seat. He left Campbell wondering what conclusion, if any, could be deduced from a glimpse of a fellow standing in seclusion and sniffing the fumes that rose from the burning of a bit of cigar? Perhaps there had been no threat, no awareness whatever in the eyes of the big fellow, but Campbell kept a chill in the small of his back for long moments afterwards. It was, in fact, a familiar sensation; for he had spent a great part of his life feeling like a hunting cat, or like one of the hunted. . . .

CHAPTER IX

Enter Pete

IN the living room of John Cobb's house, O'Rourke lingered before going down to the garage. Considering the tidy habits of this man, it was impossible that he should have left the place before locking up everything securely, and O'Rourke wanted the keys.

He found them, or a duplicate bunch, in one of the little drawers at the top of the desk; the largest of the lot might well open the garage. McGuire, while this examination went on, stood in the center of the room dripping silence, looking from one door towards another as though they were guns pointed at his head. He was a little pale, but his eyes were bright.

O'Rourke, after a measuring glance at him, led the way out of the house again. The wind that had rolled the clouds out of the sky and burnished the stars was blowing warmer than ever; the grass crunched, soggy with wet, under their feet as they made the turn of the house and found the con-

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crete path which led to the garage door. The torch of O'Rourke swept the face of the door and centered on the lock. Into it, as he had expected, the largest key fitted neatly. So new, so good was the condition of everything, the bolt slid without a sound, and one wide panel of the door swung gently open. O'Rourke sent the gleam of the torch before him over the oily pavement of the room. A far stronger blast of light smote him at once in the face, blinding him. A voice said: "Just step right in, gentlemen. Put up your hands and step right in and make yourselves at home, will you?"

O'Rourke could see the gun clearly, not the man behind it. That figure was a stodgy sketch of blackness, a dark overcoat, a hat smudged in above the mere gleam of a face, where the powerful ray of the man's pocket torch beat down the feeble blade of O'Rourke's light. The sketch of a man that O'Rourke made out might have stood for murder on the jacket of any ancient dime novel; but the gun which was clearly seen was the very essence of modernity, a big, cruelly efficient automatic. The light which he used was ultra-modern, also. The big orb of it included easily the forms of both O'Rourke and McGuire.

O'Rourke had not hesitated in putting up his hands. It was the sight of the steady gun that gave him the order, not the words.

The fellow added: "I mean you, too; and don't be a fool!"

McGuire, at the shoulder of O'Rourke, at last got his hands up. Beside O'Rourke he made two steps into the garage. The indescribable sour, thin pungency of gasoline was in the air, now, as they entered well into the chamber. Heating pipes passed over the low ceiling. Through an open door they had a glimpse — by O'Rourke's torch—of another bit of the cellar, the furnace, its gauges, its big, round, octopus arms wriggling away above.

It seemed big enough to supply motive power—to put this nautical bit of a house in motion.

"Right on with you," said the master of the situation. "Keep your faces towards the back wall. March ahead!"

They were passing this commander when something happened that O'Rourke did not see, except as a rush of shadows from the corner of his eye. Something swept up suddenly from the floor—McGuire's foot. It struck the gun out of the hand that threatened them. There was an explosion. A whiff of death went past the face of O'Rourke and left his soul trembling in its wake. The gun clanged on the floor a split part of a second after McGuire wrapped his long, powerful arms around the man in the dark, for the other's torch had clicked on the pavement and gone out.

O'Rourke turned his gun and his own light on the struggle. It was over already. One of McGuire's strangling arms had tipped back the hat of the stranger from a gray head of hair and from one of those seven faces which O'Rourke had looked at on the doors in Cobb's dressing room. The fellow was nearing sixty, perhaps. His thin hands wrenched hopelessly at the muscular arms of McGuire; he was making an altogether vague effort to strike upwards with his knee.

"I guess that's all, McGuire," said O'Rourke.

The lad stepped back, still keeping his great hands on the other, and panting with hunger. The terror was still in him, shaking him, the sort of frantic madness of fear that makes some men

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perform what cold courage would shrink from.

His mouth was partly open. His lips quivered. He looked as though he wished to get his teeth in.

"I didn't see—" he said. "I didn't see that he was such a skinny old runt. . . ."

O'Rourke stood behind the captive and rested the muzzle of his gun in the small of the fellow's back.

"Just go through him, McGuire," he said. "Get everything. And then we'll have a talk. He looks like the sort of a mug that could tell a good yarn."

The "mug" was a sun-burned face, long, thin, above what had once been a mighty neck, though now so withered that the substructure showed through the big cords and the lean of the muscles, dented at the nape where time first taps a strong man with the edge of her hand and makes the first of her marks. Though the hair was gray, the eyebrows remained black and gave a touch of grimness to the expression. And under the brows, strange to say, were eyes that should have gone with a blond complexion. They were auburn eyes, small, very youthfully bright. He was about a middle height. Once he had been a powerful specimen but the years had stripped away ten or fifteen vital pounds of meat.

McGUIRE, going through the pockets, laid on the work-bench that ran along a side of the room a small comb in a case of worn leather; a pipe whose first mouthpiece had been broken or chewed away, so that a fresh tooth-grip had been nicked into the stem; a bill-fold given away by an insurance company and with the name of the company in gilt letters on the imitation leather; a handkerchief of thick, cheap cotton; a pocket knife with a horn handle which was cracked away from the steel of the frame at one end; two slips of paper matches, one partly used; a sack of cigarette tobacco with a thin sheaf of wheatstraw papers to go with it, the papers held inside blue carboard sides by a bit of elastic string; an old rubber tobacco pouch to accommodate the pipe; a twist of string; another and larger twist of twine, new, strong, and good; half a dozen loose cartridges for the automatic, forty-five caliber; seventy-five cents in silver; three one-dollar bills; four fives; three fifties; five hundreds.

Also a neat pocket kit hardly larger than a match box containing needles of three sizes, white and black thread, pins, safety-pins, a thimble, a dozen buttons.

O'Rourke turned the bill-fold inside out. No name, no initials were in it. He turned out the collar of the man's coat; the name of the maker had been clipped out neatly.

"We better go up and sit down," said O'Rourke. "Pick up that torch and that gun; gather up all this stuff and come along after us, son, will you? You and me are gonna have to have quite a little talk, eh?" he added to the prisoner.

"Why, sure," said the older man. "Why not, anyway?"

"Go out in front of me," said O'Rourke. "Remember that I've got the light on you, and I'm nudging you in the back every minute with the muzzle of this gun. Just keep that in mind, and we oughta go and have a nice comfortable time. I seen some liquor back there in the pantry. Pinch bottles, brother."

"Ah, that's my kind of meat," said the man with the auburn eyes.

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"What'll I call you?" asked McGuire.

"Pete, they mostly call me," he answered.

"All right, Pete. March along, will you? No funny gags?"

"What kind of funny gags could I try?" asked Pete, and laughed a little, his lips curling up to show long, narrow, yellow-edged teeth. He went on: "Once I'm caught, I make a mighty quiet pet. Women like to have me around the house, and all that!"

He even added: "That's why I shot so high in the air, when the lad made the swipe at me. I didn't want to puncture the two of you."

"Did you shoot high in the air?" asked O'Rourke, blinking a little. "All right. Go right ahead, now, and we'll soon be in comfortable chairs."

So he guided Pete out of the garage and around the corner of the house onto the lawn. Pete stumbled and almost went down.

"Kind of slippery," he said.

"You damn' near slipped into hell, that time," said O'Rourke. "Watch your step!"

"You bet," answered old Pete, cheerfully, and went steadily on until they were almost at the entrance door of the house; then he dropped down again but continued the same movement, turning it into a swooping turn, while he struck out backhanded at O'Rourke.

There was time enough for O'Rourke to finger the trigger, change his mind, and then tap the gray sconce of Pete. He tapped hard enough to make the barrel of the gun ring like a bell. Pete stood straight as an arrow, but with his head rolling on his shoulders.

McGuire, seeing this from behind, came up with a shout.

"It's all right," said O'Rourke. "He won't try it again, for a while."

CHAPTER X

Report to Corrigan

THEY got a fire lighted in the living room fireplace. The flames threw a soft, comfortable bloom over everything, including gray-headed Pete, now with a big lump raised at the edge of his hair.

O'Rourke said: "I'm going to get some liquor and stuff and bring it in. Will you watch Pete, McGuire?"

"Sure I'll watch him. I'm watching him now."

"You're not watching him a damn' bit. You can't watch him with your eyes. Watch him with a gun."

"You wanta look out for me," said Pete, winking one of his strange, auburn-colored eyes at McGuire. "I might step up and knock you flat and throw you away and skin out!"

McGuire laughed. "Yeah, maybe you might," he said.

"I know he looks old and weak," said O'Rourke. "But keep that gun on him, will you?"

"All right," said McGuire, sobering.

O'Rourke left the room. He found the telephone in the pantry, first, and rang the operator.

"Give me the coroner," he said.

He heard the gasp of the girl and enjoyed it. He licked his lips and bit the end off a cigar before he was connected. He talked with the cigar in his mouth, the end of it wobbling up and down as he spoke.

"Yes? Yes?" grunted a sleepy voice.

"They've got a dead man sitting up here in the woods," said O'Rourke. "Wanta see him? He's pretty!"

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"Well? Where?" said the coroner without enthusiasm. "Why in hell can't people sit down and die in the daytime? Where is he?"

"Up here in the woods near the Cobb place. You know where that summer alcove is?"

"I know. Got the name of this party?"

"John Cobb," said O'Rourke, and hung up on the cry of astonishment.

He liked this moment of his work. He liked the thought of what might pass through the brain of the coroner when he saw the blackened, horrid mass of flesh which was left of Cobb.

He rang Corrigan.

"Yeah," groaned Corrigan, and O'Rourke could almost hear the creaking of the bed springs as the big man turned in his bed: "Yeah . . . O'Rourke . . . I didn't tell you to wake me up with any damned reports. . . . Where you phoning from? Buffalo?"

"No," said O'Rourke, "that guess is wrong."

"Why in hell should I guess? If you ain't in Buffalo, where does the train stop?"

"Why, I ain't on the train," said O'Rourke.

He relished the situation. He lighted his cigar and spread his elbows at the board of this crime, as it were; he rejoiced as though in some peculiar virtue.

"I know you ain't on the train," shouted Corrigan, "or you couldn't be telephoning. Where are you?"

"I'm in Cobb's house, out here on the Hudson. Nice little place, Corrigan. Ever been out here?"

"You *are* drunk," said Corrigan. "You mean that Cobb left the train and went home?"

"He left the train, all right," said O'Rourke.

"Go on! Go on! If you've got anything to say let me have it. Where's Cobb?"

"In hell," said O'Rourke.

"What!"

"Unless he bought wings, he couldn't get to a better place, could he?" asked O'Rourke. "Real skunk, ain't he?"

"O'Rourke, are you tryin' to make a damn fool of me?"

"I'm only telling you something, Inspector. I'm respectfully reporting that John Cobb left the train."

"You mean he disappeared?"

"I mean he was out of sight for a while after he left the train."

"And you've got no idea where he is?"

"Sure I've got an idea," said O'Rourke, "I can tell you right where he's sitting."

"Put him on the phone," said Corrigan. "I want to talk to him. Does he think that he can give the New York Police Department the merry old run-around like this?"

"I can't get him to the phone right now," said O'Rourke. "He's sitting in an iron chair, gagged, and tied up with wire."

"The hell he is! O'Rourke, what are you talking about?"

"And the face is burnt off of him," said O'Rourke. "He's as dead as burned cork, Inspector, and that's what he looks like."

"Murdered, eh?" asked the inspector.

"Unless he tied himself up and gagged himself, and poured gasoline all over himself and then touched a match to it. If he didn't do all those things, then somebody else murdered him. I kind of hold out for the murder theory. What about you?"

"Stop this damned nonsense!"

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shouted Corrigan. "O'Rourke, what happened?"

"WE had a regular dead watch on him. Going to see him every half hour. He wouldn't let us stay in the stateroom with him. Scared to be alone; scared to be with us; just a yella dog with the color leakin' out all over him. Train gets an emergency stop signal, eases up, and a few minutes later I go back and take a look, and the door's locked. Break it down. Cobb's gone through the window. Chloroform bottle on the floor. Rope hangin' from the top of the train where the thugs crawled down and fished out Cobb. Leave Campbell on the train because the poor Scotch dummy says that the kidnapers, or a part of 'em, still must be on board; says it must of been an inside job. He goes on to make the report in Chicago, anyway. I got off the train at the next stop, take a car back, find where a body's been dragged from where the train stopped, go up that trail to where John Cobb sits on an iron chair burned to bits. Watch and shoe prints to identify. Go on to his house. Find a mug there in the cellar. I'm right in the middle of the game, now. I thought you'd wanta know."

"This is the damnedest thing I ever heard of!" said the inspector. "If they wanted to murder him, why didn't they do it on the train and then get themselves out of the way?"

"They wanted to be alone with him," suggested O'Rourke. "They wanted to get something out of him, maybe . . . wait a minute. . . ."

For he felt, rather than heard, some strange sound or impact in the next room. It was less than a whisper. It was a mere pulse along the nerves, but O'Rourke believed in intuition more than any fat dowager. He got out of his chair with a noiseless speed, stepping on the edges of his soles until he was able to push open, softly, the door to the living room.

McGuire sat where he had been before but with his head lolling back, his mouth open, his eyes closed, except for one glazed and fishy slit. His long, powerful arms hung towards the floor.

A knife-thrust through the heart might have collapsed that strong machine and left it a worthless litter, like this.

Pete was not in sight. Before his empty chair, a cigarette still fumed in an ash tray, sending up a white, wavering column that was like a human ghost to O'Rourke.

But he pushed a little forward until his glance passed over the davenport, over the table in the corner, over a glimmering, colorful mass of books on the shelves, and so to the hall that led a few steps to the front door.

Down that hall it seemed to O'Rourke he saw a shadow disappear. Pete, perhaps, gliding swiftly to take shelter against the wall and then shoot O'Rourke full of lead if he pursued. O'Rourke's face grew as cold and wet as though ice-water had been sprayed upon it. He was touched with nausea and seemed to taste, in an instant, all the cigars of the last month. He could see the obscure headline above a small column in an inside newspaper page:

VETERAN DETECTIVE MURDERED IN DESERTED COUNTRY HOUSE!

For a tenth of a second he saw that picture. For another tenth part he realized, bitterly, that he always had had this coming to him. He always let the bloodhound instinct carry him away like the Irish fool that he was.

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It would have been enough, after all, to report the kidnaping of John Cobb from the train. That would have been sufficient, and then on to Chicago to testify, and so safely back to New York again, living on the fat of the land all the way, instead of tramping through mud from the sight of murder to his own death. The bullet would slap him down. It would smack him in the face.

He never had doubted that that would be his ending.

So, for two tenths of a second, O'Rourke hung in his tracks while the electric devil in his brain conjured up the certainty of disaster.

Campbell, the lucky Scotch hound, would be finishing a highball, at about this hour.

O'Rourke moved, and the movement surprised him.

Once, when he was a novice on the force, he had said to an old-timer: "How can you do it? When they got guns and everything, how can you do it?"

And the veteran had replied: "I dunno. You get used to having things expected of you. You're always scared to do something, but you always do it. Something puts a fist in the small of your back and shoves you."

So O'Rourke, by that impulse of ghostly Roman discipline, was thrust forward from the safe narrow of the doorway to the deadly open space of the room, gliding across it so crouched over that the bigness of his stomach became a constraint. With the last step, he leaned well to the right so that he had a view of the hallway. The gray head of Pete glistened there; Pete, with a hand stretched out and resting on the knob of the front door, his body still tip-toed from the effort of lightening the last step. The weight of the big automatic dragged down his right hand.

O'ROURKE held him in the gun-sights, steadily, and that steadiness permitted his heart to beat again, so that a rush of warm, kind blood poured back through his brain and body.

"Al right; I've got you," he said.

Peter, putting down his foot with a half-step made, waited silently.

"Chuck down the gun," said O'Rourke. "Don't even budge a hair on your head till you chuck down that gun."

Pete said: "I can't help the hairs on my head. They're all standing up straight by themselves."

And then he laughed a little at his own joke.

Of all the strange things that O'Rourke had seen and heard in his unusual life, this was the very strangest of all.

"If you try to dodge around at me, I'm gonna saw you right in two, brother," said O'Rourke.

"Don't you do that," Pete's calm voice answered, and he threw the gun in front of him.

It fell with a great bang on the floor, slithered into a corner, and turned so that it pointed its big, black mouth at O'Rourke. He had a chilly feeling that it might explode of its own accord.

"Gonna parade me for a while, or do I turn around?" asked Pete.

"Turn around," ordered O'Rourke, and as Pete swung about, slowly, the detective heard something stir in the room behind him, stir, grow large, advance

He flashed a glance over his shoulder and saw big McGuire risen from his chair with his arms still dangling

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senselessly and the looseness of death still in his face.

"Hey, McGuire!' he called, staring back at Pete again. "What's the matter? What happened?"

The wits seemed to return instantly to McGuire, as he answered: "That gray-headed hellion . . . where is he?"

"Step up, Pete," commanded O'Rourke.

Pete advanced, remarking: "I hated to do it, young fella. I sure hated to hang it on you, but it seemed like the smart thing to do."

McGuire walked up to him with his right hand fitting itself carefully into the shape of a hard fist.

"If you were twenty years younger and twenty pounds bigger," said McGuire, "I would certainly smash in that dirty mug of yours!"

Pete slipped a hand up over his features and nodded.

"Yeah, may be," he said, his thoughtful eyes kept surveying the body of McGuire with something more than a reasonable doubt.

"We were just sitting there, me holding the gun on him," said McGuire, "when he reaches out his hand and says: 'Wait a minute. You got something on your face.' 'Spider?' I says, thinking about the cellar we been in, and I sort of stuck my head out for him, and he rapped me."

He touched a bruised place over his temple.

"It's an old gag," said Pete, "but maybe you've noticed how many times the old gags work?"

He smiled confidingly at O'Rourke.

The detective said: "Take that twine and tie him into his chair, McGuire. Tie him good, while I watch."

So he watched, while McGuire, muttering, lashed his man into the chair.

Pete merely said:

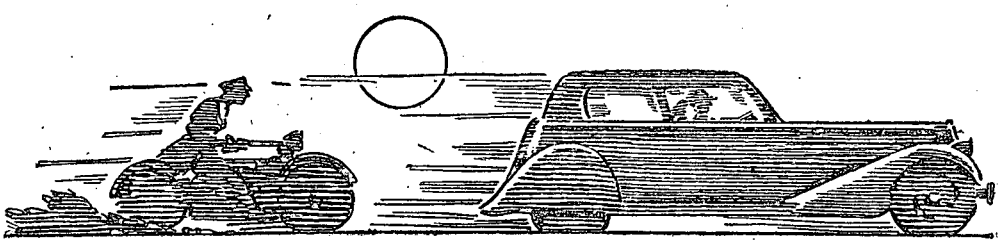
"I thought I'd be out in the open a pretty good ways before that cigarette burned out."

McGuire, with a consenting nod, went back to the telephone. The voice of Corrigan was yelling impatiently over the wire.

"Aw, slack up a minute, will you?" said O'Rourke. "I had to leave the phone a minute. The man we caught just rapped my buddy, out here, and started off. But he's back in harness, now. Take it easy, Inspector, and before I'm through with this deal, I'm gonna have the doggonedest story that you ever heard."

He hung up. . . .

Angus Campbell, speeding toward Chicago, has a full-grown mystery on his hands. Patrick O'Rourke, on Cobb's desolate estate, has another. And in some curious way both problems are interwoven into a larger pattern of crime. Breath-taking developments are coming in next week's smashing installment.



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Death Rides by Bus

Scarface flicked out an ugly-looking automatic. "Listen, punk, you've butted in enough."

By Harmon Bellamy

The Timetable Listed That Bus as Bound for Springfield, but One Passenger Was Determined to Head It Straight into the Maw of Eternity

DETECTIVE PHIL HAMMOND got on the Springfield-bound night bus exactly ten seconds before it rolled out of the Penn Terminal and headed up Eighth Avenue. This was one vacation he intended to have without interruption.

Comfortably ensconced in a rear seat, Hammond casually inspected his companions before the lights went out. The apple-cheeked clergyman sat up front, on the other side of the aisle, gazing with a benign expression out the window. The vast hulk, directly behind him, was poorly dressed, had coarse stubby hands, and looked like a truck driver on his night off.

The man occupying the seat two rows behind, although immaculately attired, might have been a movie villain. A jagged, lurid purple scar gashed its ugly way along his left cheek from ear to chin.

The girl, however, seated in front of Hammond interested him most. She

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was young and very pretty and dressed very tastefully, and Phil Hammond appreciated her charms because he was young himself and had an eye for beauty. Now he relaxed in his chair and stared out the window at the multitude of lights that blazed past along the avenue, wishing she'd turn her head his way so that he could catch another glimpse of her smooth cheeks and full red lips.

At the Capitol station two sailors entered. Young chaps, both were somewhat under the influence of liquor. One swayed up the aisle and sank into the seat opposite the girl's. The other stumbled, tilted sidewise, and sprawled awkwardly in the clergyman's lap.

"Woosh!" said the clergyman.

The bus lurched out into the street. The sailor lurched into the lap of the man with the scar.

"You drunken rat!" Scarface ejaculated viciously.

He was of powerful build. Without visible effort he tossed his unwelcome burden back into the narrow aisle. The sailor floundered there, reeling unsteadily.

"Say," he demanded groggily, "you wanna fight?"

His mate grabbed his arm, yanked him down beside him. Detective Hammond, amused by the episode, saw a bottle pass between the pair. The girl turned slightly, looked at them, then at Hammond, and smiled humorously. Hammond returned to his window.

The bus thundered forward through Manhattan, Harlem, the Bronx. Hammond, slanting his newspaper, idly scanned its pages at intervals under the glare of the fleeing street lamps.

Black headlines screamed Ralph Seybolt's sensational escape. Seybolt was the homicidal maniac who had terrorized Long Island some months previous. Formerly a truck driver and rum-runner, Seybolt had been seriously injured in an accident. His wife had fled with her lover, a sailor, the same day. From brooding, Seybolt had become mentally deranged after leaving the hospital and, for several days preceding his capture, had run amuck with a crank handle which he had stolen from a truck.

Sailors had become an obsession with him. To flaunt one before his eyes had the same effect as waving a red flag before the bloodshot eyes of a mad bull. Only recently, believing a bone was pressing against his brain, surgeons had planned an operation. But now Seybolt had broken loose from Matteawan and a city-wide search was under way to capture him before he could start a new reign of terror.

Hammond was glad he wasn't on the case, and silently congratulated himself on his good fortune. He could name a lot of things more pleasant than hunting a murderous lunatic.

At Darien there was a ten-minute rest period. The passengers clambered stiffly to the ground and entered the wayside restaurant while the bus lumbered around in back of the building to have its gas and oil checked.

Hammond, finished with his coffee, lit a cigarette and stepped outside. It was unusually sultry and the starless heavens indicated that a storm was brewing.

He was aware that more than fifteen minutes, instead of the allotted ten, had elapsed. He was about to walk to the rear of the station to investigate the delay when the bus rolled around the corner and halted. The driver got out, and Hammond saw he was a new man.

"Changing drivers?" he queried sociably.

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"Yep. I'm taking the load into Springfield for Bill."

The passengers climbed back into the bus. The driver waited outside. Five more minutes passed.

"Where the deuce is Bill?" said the driver. "He only lives a little ways from here, and he asked me to drop him off at his place."

The driver spat into the cinders.

"Well, the heck with him. I can't wait any longer. We're way behind schedule now. He'll have to walk, that's all."

He climbed in, grumbling at the thoughtlessness of people.

"Everybody here?" he asked. "Let's see your tickets."

He went up the aisle, came back. He crawled in behind the wheel, pulled out a card from the metal box, checked it. The card went back into the box, the pencil into his leather legging. The lights extinguished, the gears clashed, and the night bus began to crawl into the road. . . .

SOMEONE whistled outside. Hammond glanced out the window, saw a car parked nearby. A man dashed across the road, arms waving, and cut in front of the bus as the driver jerked it to a stop. The door opened and the new arrival, a big, dark-complexioned man, jumped in.

"Almost missed you!" he panted.

"Say," said the driver, "I thought we were all here."

"Oh, I'm not one of your passengers. I was on the bus before this one, but it went off without me while I was grabbing a bite. I've been hanging around waiting for you."

"Where's your ticket?"

"Haven't any. I left it on the other bus. The counter man in the restaurant said you'd take me along."

The driver grunted. "Okay. If you're stringing me, it ain't no dough outta my pocket."

The bus started off again. The newcomer stumbled along the aisle in the darkness and sat down in front of the sailors. Hammond wondered if this was a new method of beating a fare. He hadn't seen the man in or near the restaurant, but he *had* seen him leave the automobile. Well, it was none of his business if the driver was lax.

It was still intensely hot. The heat from the throbbing motor wafted back into the interior of the bus and caused a drowsiness to creep over Hammond. He peered sleepily at his watch. Nearly midnight. They'd be in New Haven pretty soon. Lightning zigzagged across the black sky.

He noticed that the girl was dozing. He felt like dozing again himself. The other passengers were silent. Heads drooped here and there. Hammond's head drooped, too.

A drunken, horror-stricken scream brought him upright in his chair, flesh tingling all over. The sudden jerking of the bus knocked him against the girl's seat. The lights snapped on, blinding him.

Another piercing scream—this time from the girl. She was staring past his shoulder, her eyes dilating enormously with horror, her cheeks ashen beneath the delicate make-up. A hand swept up to her swiftly pulsing throat.

Hammond twisted his head. For the first time he discovered that the sailors had moved back a couple of rows. The one nearest the window was shaking his companion roughly by the shoulder, and yelping fearfully.

"Whattsa matter, Jim? Whattsa matter?"

Hammond sprang into the aisle toward them. Jim sagged forward, held

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up only by his mate's trembling arm. Streaks of crimson leaked down his neck, soaking the wide collar of his shore outfit.

As Hammond arrived, the first sailor loosened his grip on his friend and shrank away toward the window. The other, Jim, slumped forward; his head struck against the seat in front and he toppled sidewise on his face into the aisle.

The girl moaned in sudden terror. Hammond blanched, choked.

The sailor lay, an inert heap, on the floor of the bus. The back of his neck was a welter of congealing blood. In the center of that great crimson blotch the bloody handle of a jack-knife protruded incongruously. It was murder!

The driver gaped over Hammond's broad shoulder, inhaled sharply, and swore. "What the hell's this?"

An empty whisky bottle lay at the dead man's feet. The place stank with the odor of whisky and freshly-spilled blood. Hammond felt sick at the pit of his stomach.

He reached forth, grabbed the other sailor by the collar, and yanked him into the aisle. The man's alcoholic breath smote him in the face, but he was quite sober now. His skin was a sickly yellow, and his mouth slobbered and twitched as if he were on the verge of an epileptic fit. Hammond shook him as a cat shakes a mouse.

"Why did you do it? Go ahead—tell us why!"

The man screamed. "I didn't! I didn't do it! I swear I didn't!"

"You're the only one who had a chance. You were drunk. You killed him!"

"I didn't!" the sailor gurgled desperately. "Why should I do it? Jim and me—we was buddies. You don't think I'd sit alongside my own buddy and stick a knife in his neck, do you?"

"Funnier things have happened."

"Mister, you got to believe me. It wasn't me that did it. I was asleep right there beside him, and I woke up and asked him for a cigarette, and he didn't answer me. So I shakes him and he don't wake up. I put my hand on his neck to shake him again and it was sticky and I let out a yell. That's all I know, and it's the truth—so help me!"

II

HAMMOND raised a hand as if to slap him. The man cringed, gulping. And Hammond relented. "Wait a sec," he said. "Maybe I've been hasty. I guess I'm a little excited. We're all excited. Let's take things easy and try to figure it out. Maybe you didn't do it. I know I didn't. But if you didn't and I didn't, then somebody else in this bus did it. One of us here is a filthy, cold-blooded murderer!"

"Who in hell do you think you are?" fumed the man with the scar. "You can't get away with this. Are you trying to say one of us bumped that drunken heel?"

"Well, somebody here did it. I don't know why. But every one of you had the same opportunity. We were all sleeping, or supposed to be asleep. Anybody here could have sneaked back and slipped that knife into his neck."

"You talk like a dick," sneered Scarface.

On a sudden, inexplicable impulse Hammond, who had been on the verge of revealing his identity, decided against it.

"Anybody could have stabbed this man," he repeated.

"I didn't," chattered the clergyman. "I didn't move from my seat all evening. The Lord is my witness."

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"I certainly didn't do it," jabbered the driver.

"Well," said the man who had joined on at Darien, "I guess I didn't do it, either."

"And he's going to say he didn't, too," jeered Scarface, pointing at the poorly-dressed hulk who looked like a truck driver on his right. "That leaves it up to the girl and me. Well, I don't suppose a skirt would do it, so I'm the sucker. Is that it?"

In his rage the scar was a livid gash across his cheek.

"Listen," he roared, "I don't know a damned thing about this, see? And I don't give a damn about it. All I want is to get this blasted trip over with. I didn't buy a ticket so I could spend the whole night on a lousy bus."

"None of us did," Hammond reminded him grimly.

"To hell with that stiff, then. Let him lie there until we hit some burg. Let's get going. All I want to do is to finish this ride and get the hell outta here!"

"This guy's right," said the driver. "We can't stay here all night. I'm way overdue now."

"When we hit the next town," added the dark-complexioned man from Darien, "we can notify the police."

"Sure," said Scarface. "Let *them* figure it out. That's their business; they get paid for it. And, if you guys want to be dicks, we can all sit up front and work on it while we're traveling. Only, for the love of Mike, let's get going."

"Suits me," Hammond agreed.

Leaving the corpse, they pushed up front and crowded into the seats near the door. The driver eased in behind the wheel and tried the starter. Nothing happened.

He tried again. No answer.

"Now what the hell!" he muttered.

He jammed it again. The starter was dead.

"Of all the blasted luck!" blared the driver. "Now she won't perk at all. This trip is jinxed!"

The clergyman shifted uneasily. The sailor cast a nervous backward glance at the lifeless body of his pal. Scarface swore softly.

"Guess you'll have to use the crank," Hammond suggested.

The driver glared madly at him. "I ain't dumb!" he barked. "Think I don't know it?"

He poked around for it, but the crank wasn't in its accustomed place alongside the wall to his left.

"If that lady wasn't here," he exploded, "I'd say something!"

"Maybe there's an extra one in the tool kit," Hammond said.

"Maybe!" snarled the driver. "Maybe there's one under the rear seat."

He groped back along the aisle, stepped over the sailor's crumpled body and its surrounding pool of blood, and reached the extreme end of the bus. He unlocked the latches and lifted the length of seat which stretched from window to window.

A strangled ejaculation burst from his throat then, and he staggered backward, gasping virulent oaths.

Hammond leaped after him, stared over his broad shoulder, and swore, too.

Huddled into an incongruous, gruesome mess in the pit of the seat was a man's body, fully attired. The head was a broken, battered, bloody pulp. Hammond's stomach curdled.

"What is it?" the girl whispered behind him.

He thrust her back. "Don't look! It—it's horrible!"

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"Here's what did it," announced the driver.

He hauled up a crank handle from the depths of the seat. The heavy iron was bespattered with the gore from the victim's skull. The girl moaned, shrank against Hammond.

"Who is he?" the Darien passenger inquired.

"How should I know?" the driver cried. "Golly! Nobody's gonna recognize *him* any more!"

"You're wrong," said Hammond. "Haven't you eyes? It's the other driver—the one you called Bill."

"Bill?" gasped the driver.

"See that ring on his finger? I noticed it when he punched my ticket at the Penn Station. It's Bill, all right."

"Jeez!" The driver swallowed. "I remember now. Bill's girl gave it to him for his birthday. Jeez!"

"Say," interrupted Scarface viciously, "are we gonna stay here all night and hold a wake over this corpse?"

"But that's—that's my pal, Bill! That's Bill!"

"I don't give a damn who he is. I got to get to Hartford, and I ain't gonna hang around here all night. We'll carry two stiffs instead of one, but let's get going."

THE girl stifled a faint scream. Hammond looked at her shocked face and gritted his teeth.

"This," he insisted, "is more important than any business waiting for you in Hartford. Two murders have been committed here, and somebody on this bus is guilty."

"Are you starting that all over again?" raged Scarface.

"Why are *you* so anxious to keep going?"

"Why, damn you!"

Scarface flicked a hand under his left armpit and Hammond stared into the bluish muzzle of an ugly-looking automatic.

"Listen, punk, you've butted in enough. One more crack and I'll spill you where you stand. Nobody's gonna pin a rap on me, see? I didn't bump off these guys. I don't know who did, or how it happened, and I don't give a damn. All I want to do is keep moving. And nobody's stopping me, see? From now on I'm boss around here. You, driver, you get that crank and start her up and get going, or I'll kick the whole bunch of you off this old crate and drive the damned thing in myself. Savvy?"

The clergyman, gulping with fright, backed away. The man who resembled a truck driver followed. The dark-complected stranger eyed Scarface coolly.

"What are you? A gangster?"

"None of your damned business. Get going!"

The Darien addition shrugged his shoulders and moved. So did the driver, the bloody crank dangling in his hand. Hammond, with a final glance at the mutilated head, trailed him.

With the gun in Scarface's fist menacing him, the driver got out and cranked. The motor raced into action. The driver climbed back into his seat, dropped the crank near his feet, and released the emergency brake.

"Well?" His eyes glinted dangerously. "What now?"

"You just pull into that road and step on it. The sooner we hit Hartford the better for all of you. No more stops, see? I don't care who wants to get off, or where you want to get off. There ain't gonna be no more stops until I give the word."

He sat down in back of Hammond

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and the girl. The clergyman and the poorly clad hulk sat together in the first seat on the right, across from Hammond, who had joined the girl. The sailor and the Darien passenger occupied the chair behind them. Scarface was in a position where he could command the entire group.

"Okay," he announced grimly. "Driver, turn off the lights and pull back that curtain so I can watch you."

The driver obeyed. Then he shifted the gears, applied gas, and the bus rolled once more along the highway. It was exactly thirty minutes past midnight.

The girl rustled beside Hammond. A gash of lightning lit the interior of the bus, and he made out her tensed features, the quivering mouth. Something inside of him seemed to melt. He took one of her hands, pressed it reassuringly.

"I'm afraid," she whispered. "Terribly afraid."

"Don't be," he said. "There's no danger. Just relax."

"I—I can't. It's all so—so dreadful!" She was crying softly.

And then, suddenly, he recalled it. The newspaper. The screaming headlines. Seybolt — Ralph Seybolt — the escaped maniac! The crank handle murderer! The homicidal mania toward sailors!

"What is it?" whispered the girl. "What's the matter? You're excited."

"Shhh," he breathed. "Let me think. I've got an idea."

His mind worked now at lightning speed. Ralph Seybolt, of course. Ralph Seybolt was a passenger in this bus that hurtled through the black, brooding night. One of these people near Phil Hammond was a mentally deranged, inhuman slaughterer. A madman was aboard!

The bus zoomed on through the darkness. Seybolt's description fought for clarity in Hammond's whirling mind. ". . . big man . . . six feet tall . . . broad shoulders . . . appears perfectly sane until cornered . . . endowed with superhuman cunning and strength . . . has been known to disguise himself . . . hates sailors . . ."

The huge bus roared on. Hammond's brow corrugated into hard ridges of thought. Lives hung in the balance.

Scarface — big, tall, broad-shouldered. The scar might be artificial. Scarface was a gunman. So were rumrunners. Seybolt had been a rumrunner.

The driver was big, broad-shouldered, about six feet tall. So was the dark-complected man from Darien. So was the poorly dressed man who looked like a truck driver on his night off. Seybolt had been a truck driver.

Hammond peered through the gloom, seeking a glimpse of his features, his expression. The man had been the quietest passenger of all throughout the trip.

The man from Darien was a mystery. He had lied to the driver. Also, he had got on at the official rest station. The first murder had been committed during that stop.

III

HAMMOND'S head whirled. Anyone could have done that brutal job. Every man aboard had been out of Hammond's sight for at least five minutes during that rest period. Even the clergyman had disappeared for a while. And he, too, was a strapping six-footer.

The bus thundered through the night, pounding past sleeping hamlets, over railroad crossings, along pitch-

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dark roads. Lightning flashed overhead. A reverberating roar drummed across the Stygian skies. And the storm that had threatened so long descended. Rain sheeted downward. The road glistened vaguely before the dazzling headlights. And the bus roared on. It was one o'clock.

Hammond was desperate. The thing must be solved before Scarface skipped out at Hartford. Scarface might be Ralph Seybolt. Scarface might be the murderous madman.

"Please," the girl whispered. "I'm getting wet."

Hammond reached past her, pulled down the window. Scarface, still wary, followed his example. So did the others. Lightning blazed across the sky. Rain needled the panes savagely. The road was dancing, slippery ribbon. The bus lurched, skidded dangerously. It was truly a night of hell and horror.

"You're going to do something," breathed the girl. "I know it. What is it? What are you trying to do?"

"Don't know. But, maybe—"

He had it, then. Had it! There *was* a way, just one way in which to uncover the murderer. It might work, and it might not, but it was a chance. It all hinged on luck and nerve, but it would have to be done. If the plan didn't succeed . . . But it just had to. He couldn't fail now.

"Listen," he murmured into the girl's ear, "don't get scared at anything I do, or at anything that might happen."

"What are you going to do?"

"Just trust me."

Her luminous eyes met his steadily in the gloom. "I do trust you," she said.

"Slide down as far as you can," he cautioned.

He pressed her arm and slowly she eased her body down upon the seat until her head was concealed from Scarface. Hammond could sense her breathlessness.

The bus growled on at terrific speed. The tires slipped on the wet pavement, gripped, carried on. Rain rattled loudly against the windows. Thunder overhead. Lightning gashes.

And Hammond spoke to the man behind the gun.

"Got a cigarette?"

Scarface grunted. "I guess so."

He kept his weapon trained on Hammond as he groped with his free hand in one of his pockets. The gun tilted slightly downward toward the back of Hammond's seat. Hammond stiffened. His left arm edged over the back of the seat, palm open, as though waiting for the cigarette.

"Here," said Scarface.

A small white cylinder lay in his fingers. For one lone moment he was a fraction off his guard.

Hammond's left hand darted forward with the speed of a striking snake. His fingers closed about the wrist of the gun arm, twisted sharply upward and away. All in the same instant he was out of his chair, towering over Scarface. With a supreme coordination of all his muscles, he wrenched the arm, locked it between both of his own, and strained.

Scarface screamed. The bus careened from one side of the road to the other. The gun belched flame, roared deafeningly. A slug tore through the roof. Scarface, cursing vilely, was half on his feet. Hammond twisted his body, bent that arm . . . bent it . . . bent it. . . . Scarface clawed at him, groaning with pain. The arm would snap soon. Hammond remorselessly threw all his weight upon it, shook the wrist.

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The bus skidded crazily, surged on. Scarface screamed again in agony. The automatic dropped from his paralyzed fingers. He couldn't move an inch. To move would mean a broken arm. But Hammond suddenly released the arm, dived headlong for the gun, and sprang back, panting, in the aisle.

Scarface leaped after him, only to stop abruptly. The gun in Hammond's fist was death pointing rigidly at his guts.

"Back!" Hammond shouted. "Back, before I blow a hole through you!"

A jagged streak of lightning lit up the interior of that hell on wheels. The clergyman and the sailor were hanging on to their seats, mouths agape, eyes distended with terror. The dark-complexioned individual and the truck driver were reeling upward. Scarface, snarling, gripped his injured arm, cursed.

The bus splashed through a great puddle, blinding vision, blotting out the road temporarily. It catapulted around a hairpin curve, driving into the teeth of the storm.

"All of you," shouted Hammond, "listen to me!—And don't anybody make a move until I get through talking. I'll shoot the first man who moves!"

"Damn you!" bellowed Scarface.

"One of you," said Hammond grimly, "is Ralph Seybolt. Seybolt—listen to what I've got to say."

A CROOKED, dazzling streak illuminated the cramped space for a numbing moment. Hammond was aware of the girl's bloodless cheeks; of Scarface, purple of countenance, massaging his aching arm; of the clergyman mumbling a prayer; of the Darien passenger's gleaming orbs. The man who looked like a truck driver was edging forward, his face contorted horridly. In that throbbing instant of light they resembled a pack of maniacs bent on murder.

"You've been running around," continued Hammond, "trying to kill off every sailor you could get your hands on. You've been looking for the sailor who ran off with your wife, haven't you, Ralph Seybolt? You've killed four now and put two more in the hospital. But you haven't found the right one yet."

He knew he was a spectacle, standing there in the center of the aisle, swaying as the bus swayed. But it was the chance he was taking, the one big gamble. If the madman was as mad as he was supposed to be, as Hammond hoped he was . . .

"Seybolt," he yelled, above the crash of thunder, "I don't blame you for wanting to kill the sailor who stole your wife. Any real man would have wanted to do it. Even the law forgives a man who avenges his honor. But why kill off every sailor in the navy? Why don't you find the right one, get rid of him, and be done with it?"

Someone snarled hysterically, horribly, in the darkness.

"I know you'll be satisfied when you get the right one. I know I would. You're a man who'll quit when his honor has been avenged. Well, I'm going to help you. I know the man you're looking for. I know the sailor who stole your wife!"

Another snarl, inhuman in its ferocity, ripped through the bus. The men gripped their chairs, pawing frenziedly, glaring furiously at each other.

"Damn you!" blared Scarface. "What in hell are you trying to do?"

The bus slewed up a long steep hill, fighting for traction.

"The sailor who ran off with your

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wife, Seybolt!" cried Hammond. "The sailor who stole her from you is here in this bus! You can have him, Seybolt! Take him! He's all yours!"

"No!" yelped the sailor. "No!"

"That's your man!" Hammond roared. "That's the one!"

The bus had reached the summit of the slope. Careening madly, it started downward, sliding, slipping.

"No!" bawled the sailor. "No, I didn't! It's a dirty, filthy lie! I didn't! I swear I didn't!"

The bus spewed down that hill. There was no longer a hand on the wheel, guiding it. A roar burst forth upon them—a horrible, insane, maddening roar. Lightning zigzagged through the interior like a grotesque, devilish pattern.

As one, the passengers whirled. The driver was groping up out of his seat. The bloody crank handle was in his hand. His face was a frightful Gargantuan caricature, a distorted nightmare of crazed fury, with protruding maniacal eyes that were glittering balls of horror.

"No!" gurgled the sailor. "No!"

"Help!" blurted the dark-complected man of Darien.

The bus hurtled downward through the raging torrent, unmanned, unchecked, running wild.

"You!" mouthed the driver hideously. "You! You did it! You're the one! You die for that!"

The crank handle went over his head in a great avenging swing. And he leaped. In that spellbound instant, when no one could move, when paralysis was upon them all, murder was again on the way. And then Hammond fired.

The crash jarred against his eardrums. The madman shrieked, clawed the air. Hammond pulled the trigger a second time. The driver staggered. The handle slipped from his fingers, crashed through the window. Glass tinkled. Rain poured in. The maniac groaned, swayed in the middle of the aisle, his face turning green.

Simultaneously things happened. Scarface and the poorly clad man bore down upon him, wrestled him to the floor of the bus. Someone leaped in the darkness for the wheel of the charging, hurtling monster. Hammond bent forward and slapped the butt of the gun against the madman's temple.

The rain and wind pattered and whistled through the windows. Slowly applied brakes screeched a protest. The bus skidded, straightened itself out, slowed. Skidded again, slowed some more, came to a dead stop.

IV

LIGHTS flashed on. Rain pounded the windows and the roof. Thunder boomed above. The dark-complected man from Darien, blinking, ashen-faced, extricated himself from the driver's seat, and shoved forth a huge paw at Hammond.

"Well," he said hoarsely, "you did it all right. I guess we owe our lives to you."

Hammond wiped sweat from his brow, smiled wanly.

"The truth is, I suspected you as much as anybody else. You're not a stray passenger. Just who are you?"

The Darien addition smiled back. "I'm only an inspector for the company. And it's my fault all this happened. I thought this Seybolt was a new driver I hadn't heard about, and I meant to let him finish the run to Springfield."

"And I," said the girl softly to Hammond, as the bus resumed its journey, "think I like you very much."

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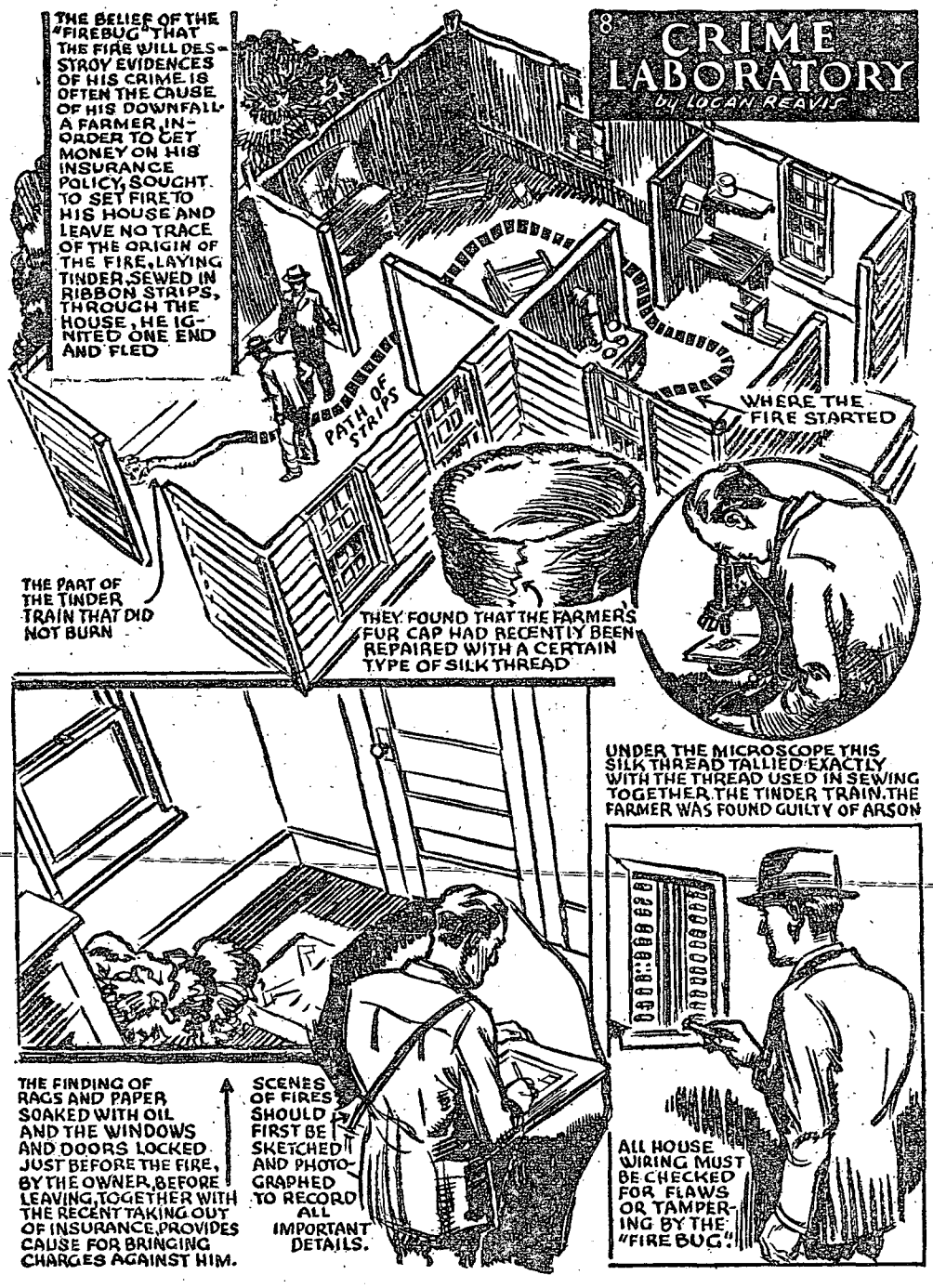
8 CRIME LABORATORY
by LOCAH REAVIS
THE BELIEF OF THE "FIREBUG" THAT THE FIRE WILL DESTROY EVIDENCES OF HIS CRIME IS OFTEN THE CAUSE OF HIS DOWNFALL. A FARMER, IN ORDER TO GET MONEY ON HIS INSURANCE POLICY, SOUGHT TO SET FIRE TO HIS HOUSE AND LEAVE NO TRACE OF THE ORIGIN OF THE FIRE, LAYING TINDER, SEWED IN RIBBON STRIPS, THROUGH THE HOUSE, HE IGNITED ONE END AND FLED
PATH OF STRIPS
WHERE THE FIRE STARTED
THE PART OF THE TINDER TRAIN THAT DID NOT BURN
THEY FOUND THAT THE FARMER'S FUR CAP HAD RECENTLY BEEN REPAIRED WITH A CERTAIN TYPE OF SILK THREAD
UNDER THE MICROSCOPE THIS SILK THREAD TALLIED EXACTLY WITH THE THREAD USED IN SEWING TOGETHER THE TINDER TRAIN. THE FARMER WAS FOUND GUILTY OF ARSON
THE FINDING OF RAGS AND PAPER SOAKED WITH OIL AND THE WINDOWS AND DOORS LOCKED JUST BEFORE THE FIRE, BY THE OWNER, BEFORE LEAVING, TOGETHER WITH THE RECENT TAKING OUT OF INSURANCE, PROVIDES CAUSE FOR BRINGING CHARGES AGAINST HIM.
SCENES OF FIRES SHOULD FIRST BE SKETCHED AND PHOTOGRAPHED TO RECORD ALL IMPORTANT DETAILS.
ALL HOUSE WIRING MUST BE CHECKED FOR FLAWS OR TAMPERING BY THE "FIREBUG"!

Running down the "firebug" provides the crime laboratory with one of its keenest thrills. Careful photography and sketching on the premises should be conducted at the outset of every serious investigation. The greatest care must be exercised in searching for all traces of the "fire-

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LABORATORY STUDIES OF TYPES OF SOOT PRODUCED BY DIFFERENT INFLAMMABLE OILS AS A MEANS OF IDENTIFYING TYPE USED BY CRIMINAL IN STARTING THE FIRE.
SOOT BEING DEPOSITED ON A COLD PLATE
THE ASHES OF THE FIRE SHOULD CAREFULLY BE SIFTED TO FIND TRACES OF TIME FUSES, CANDLE WICKS, OIL SOAKED PAPER, ETC.
ENCLOSING PAN OF WATER
DETECTING THE FIREBUG'S METHOD BY SMELLING. CHARRED PIECES OF WOOD MAY CARRY KEROSENE ODOR FOR A LONG TIME.) PIECES OF SUSPECTED CHARRED WOOD MAY BE PUT INTO A GLASS VESSEL, COVERED OVER AND HEATED IN WATER TO ABOUT 155°F. THE OIL'S ODOR IS RECOGNIZED AFTER THE VESSEL'S COVER IS LIFTED.
WHERE POSSIBLE, FURNITURE, LAMPS AND OTHER ARTICLES SHOULD BE PLACED—AFTER THE FIRE—IN THE POSITIONS TAKEN *BEFORE* THE FIRE. SUSPICIOUS ARRANGEMENTS MAY SHOW HOW FIRE WAS STARTED.
TABLES, CHAIRS OR LAMPS USUALLY LEAVE UNBURNT MARKS ON THE FLOOR THUS AIDING IN SHOWING THEIR PLACES
POWDERING AREAS SUSPECTED AS BEING SOAKED WITH INFLAMMABLE OILS, IN ORDER TO START THE FIRE, WITH THE RED DYE RHODOKRIT. CERTAIN OILS TURN RED 12 HOURS AFTER THIS APPLICATION. WITH THE MICROSCOPE THE RED MAY BE DETECTED A FEW HOURS EARLIER.

bug's" favorite use of rapidly burning oils or candles. Such evidence can often break down an "airtight" alibi. Another CRIME LABORATORY feature, explaining the use of hair in criminal investigations, will appear soon in an early issue of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

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TRUE SHORT
DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

The gendarme tried to figure out how it might have happened

Murder *in the* Afternoon

By John Kobler

THE gendarme who found the car said it was the worst crack-up he'd ever seen. It was a black sedan—rather, it had been a black sedan. Now it was heap of tangled, twisted metal and splinters of glass. It had struck the tree head-on and apparently caught fire, for the seats and woodwork were charred and black. It was an odd place for a motor accident somehow—the historic Bois de Vincennes on the outskirts of Paris. Many curious things had happened there. Duels had been fought, lovers had held their meetings, murder and suicide had known the spot, and some of the most stirring chapters of French history had been played out against that rich, leafy background.

Eminent French Pathologists Said of Guy Davin: "He Is a Moral Madman. He Will Steal. Surely He Will Kill."

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But a typical twentieth century motor crash seemed strangely out of place. . . .

The gendarme tried to figure out how it might have happened. The scene was a winding little by-path off the main drive. It led nowhere in particular. The car had apparently jumped the ditch and bounced off two or three of those thick oaks. There was blood on the running-board and wind-shield. That was easily explained. The driver had miraculously escaped with light injuries and gone to get aid. What was not so easily explained was the absence of the back seat cushion. The gendarme shrugged, removed his little black notebook. "*Black sedan . . . 1931 model . . . license: 7197 R E 3.*" He added the date: *De ember 17, 1931,* and returned to the Préfecture to make his report.

A few hours later, that report, in the natural course of things, found its way to the desk of Commissaire Guillaume, a quick-moving, thoughtful young fellow with steel emotions and a hair-trigger brain. But there was a remark, tacked on to the end of the report, which caused the cigarette in his mouth to droop and started his long, tenuous fingers to drumming restlessly on the desk. "A routine tracing of the license number was made. It belongs to a respectable merchant whose car is in his garage with another plate substituted."

Guillaume turned to a subordinate. "Obviously, this black sedan was carrying a stolen license."

"No doubt," the other murmured. "Probably the sedan was stolen, too. I notice that motor thefts have increased since American gangsters have made a habit of visiting these shores."

"Yes, yes, but it's more than that," Guillaume insisted with a gesture of impatience. "There are a lot of things about this business I don't like."

The suspicious bloodhound—the officer chuckled inwardly—scenting the trail where no trail exists. How he loves a chase!

"For instance," Guillaume resumed dreamily, "I should like to know what became of the driver. Also, how is an accident of such violence possible in broad daylight? From this report, the car simply went off the side of the road. Why? And what became of the missing back seat?"

"Oh, I suppose we can find out, if you really think there's something sinister about it."

"*At once!*"

But before the investigation went very far Commissaire Guillaume received an extremely interesting telephone call. It was a telephone linesman, with some pretensions towards being an amateur sleuth. He came right to the point:

"I read about that motor accident, M'sieur, in the afternoon papers. I've been wondering if there's any connection with something I've found. I've discovered two bundles of clothing and the remains of a man's shoe. There's blood on the bundles and an attempt seems to have been made to destroy them by soaking them in gasoline and burning them."

"Indeed?" Guillaume said. "Where did you make this discovery?"

"In St. Cucufa Woods."

"That would be about 10 kilos from the Bois de Vincennes?"

"Just about."

"All right, I'll come at once."

In detail, the linesman's find consisted of fragments of two shirts, one smaller than the other, portions of a man's underwear, one sock, one vest-button, one shoe and fragments of two coats. The linesman explained that he had found them half-buried under some leaves in the woods.

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Now, there was absolutely nothing to connect these articles with the abandoned sedan of the Bois de Vincennes beyond the fact that both discoveries were made within a few hours of each other. But French detectives place a strong reliance on intuition as opposed to pure deduction. Guillaume decided to play his hunch this time for all it was worth.

"Let's see that button," he asked. It was a small, black button, but stamped on the face in gold lettering were the partially effaced letters: *LI*—. "All right," he instructed one of his agents. "Find out if there's a haberdasher in town whose surname begins *LI*. If so, see if he can remember to whom he sold this vest."

He was interrupted then by a second agent, who had been making a tour of the neighborhood.

"There's a fellow up the road," he informed Guillaume somewhat breathlessly, "who runs a filling station. He says that last night he sold two cans of gas to a thin, nervous youth with a high voice. The youth handed him 1000 francs and he noticed that it was stained with blood. The gas vendor said to the youth, sort of jokingly: 'Who did you kill to get this?' And the youth answered in the same spirit: 'If I was the only one around to commit crimes, there wouldn't be any.'"

"Good work," the Commissaire said. "Now for that haberdasher."

IT was easier than they expected. Guillaume's ideas had a habit of working out that way. They found a chap called Lidvall on the Rue de la Pépinière. Yes, that was his button, all right. He looked through his books. Here it was! He sold a vest with such buttons to an American called Richard Wall.

The name made Guillaume jump. Wall? But that was a very familiar name. He searched his memory. Wall . . . Wall . . . American gangster, race-tout. . . . Yes, the fellow had a bad record. Back at the Préfecture he demanded a complete dossier on him. It is a practice of the French police to keep rather extensive dossiers on every foreigner.

Wall's dossier was detailed. He had come to Paris several years before and had remained, an expatriate. At first he was rich, flashing 1000-franc notes in the gayer and less reputable night-haunts of Montmartre and Montparnasse. He let it be known that he was something of a big-shot in his own country, whence he had been obliged to flee owing to gangster threats of revenge. It seems he had been a henchman of Al Capone.

His fortune at this time was estimated at between 200,000 and 300,000 francs and he squandered it in princely fashion. He drank, he gambled, he invariably had some pretty girl in tow. Digging further into his past, Guillaume found that more recently his constant companion was a beautiful, little American chorine, one Connie King, real name: Constance Mildred Terbeck. At eighteen, this girl had been a featured showgirl on Broadway in Earl Carroll's Vanities. Later, she embarked for Paris and what adventures she could find there.

Eventually Connie and Wall quarreled. The bone of contention was Jean Barbat, a dapper, bored-looking young man who acted as Wall's secretary. Connie had fallen in love with him. In the end, she ran off with him leaving her older protector flat. He retaliated by charging the pair with swindling him out of $20,000. The accusation was unfounded and the case

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was dismissed. Apparently the two men, Barbat and Wall, patched things up for they were soon seen dining and drinking together again.

Wall's money was soon gone. He was broke, desperate. And the police suspected that he was resorting to some of his old practices. Officially, he claimed to support himself by selling stock market tips. Actually, he was thought to be selling cocaine, handling stolen cars—one of which proved to have belonged to Georges Carpentier, the ex-heavyweight fighter—and indulging in various forms of skullduggery.

"But," said Guillaume, after assimilating these facts, "I am told that Wall is a short, stocky fellow, so he could not be the purchaser of those cans of gasoline. Just where is Wall now?"

The agent to whom the question was addressed: "That's what we've been trying to find out all day. His favorite hang-out is a place called the Pet Bar. He went in there every day, but he hasn't been seen since the morning of the seventeenth."

"The morning of the black sedan," Guillaume commented grimly. "My friend," the Commissaire mused, "I do not believe that Richard Wall is alive. I believe he has been murdered for what reason we shall find out."

"Murdered?"

"Precisely. The abandoned car, the half-burnt clothes, his absence, the bloodstains—everything points to it."

"Have you discovered exactly when and in whose company Wall was last seen?"

"Yes. He lunched that day at a restaurant on the Avenue des Ternes with Jean Barbat, Roger Izoard and Guy Davin."

"Barbat, the fellow who stole his girl?"

"Precisely."

"Hmm. There's a motive there certainly. Izoard—there's a name I don't know."

"Oh, there's nothing against him. Just a hanger-on of the same crowd Wall moved in."

"But Davin, Guy Davin. I've heard of him."

"I'm sure you have. Here's his record. It's a beauty!"

It was, as the agent remarked, a beauty, and Guillaume studied it intently. Guy Davin was a young ne'er-do-well of 26. He came of a good family, quiet middle-class people, once well-to-do. There had been a number of navy officers in the family, some artists and at least one politician. The father had operated a garage at Neuilly, but went bankrupt.

The family had seen some lean times since.

Davin's education had been somewhat neglected. But he made up for it in sports. He excelled in motor racing, tennis, riding and doted on flying. In 1930, he met a beautiful Russian girl in a Russian cabaret and married her. They lived and were still living with the elder Davins in their place at Neuilly in conditions of extreme poverty. Davin and his wife rarely ate there. She quarreled with her mother-in-law.

But what interested Guillaume was the long history of Davin's petty crimes and violences. Since childhood he had stolen, first 100-franc notes from his mother, later 5,000 francs, 4,000 of which was discovered by his brother in a desk drawer. From this he graduated to stealing cars and snatching handbags from young women whom he persuaded to drive with him. There was evidence that Davin had stolen Georges Carpentier's car, later marketed by Wall. He was known to have knocked his

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father down and, when serving a short term in prison, of smashing a pane of glass. Although dissolute and depraved, he never drank anything but water. He was described as tall, slender, handsome, given to violent tempers and totally unmoral.

"A bad actor," Guillaume said, "and I should like to know more about him. In fact, I am going to call on him—unexpectedly."

GUILLAUME found Davin home with his wife and mother. He led the youth alone into the parlor and spoke to him gently, persuasively. He found him calm, self-possessed, genial even.

"As you know," Guillaume said, "we are trying to find out what happened to Richard Wall. I understand you lunched with him the day of his disappearance."

"That is so, Monsieur. More than that, I took him for a drive after lunch and dropped him off some place. I don't remember where."

"What do you remember of that lunch?"

"Oh, nothing very special. Wall had just borrowed $300 from an American friend and he asked me if I would take it around to the bank and convert it into francs. I did so, got seven thousand francs for it and returned to the restaurant. I gave him the money and after lunch we took a little ride together."

"That is all you know?"

"Yes, M'sieur."

"Very well, Davin. I daresay this thing will be cleared up in a day or two. Meanwhile stay where we can reach you, if necessary."

"Certainly, sir."

On the way out, Guillaume was stopped by Davin's mother, a frail, little old lady. She was highly perturbed. "Oh, M'sieur," she cried, "what has my boy done now?"

"I have accused no one, Madame. I have no reason—"

"My son has always done terrible things, I know, but with so much childishness and naïveté, I'm confused. And those two men who called on him this morning—"

"What two men?"

"Izoard and Barbat. Friends, Guy calls them. They're bandits, that's what they are."

Guillaume said nothing, but he made a mental note to question Barbat.

"My son was a bad child, but he's my son just the same. He can be sweet and gentle, but he suffers these sudden attacks of violence. He's ill, I tell you. At one time, we wanted to have him committed in an insane asylum. Oh, he should be pitied, M'sieur."

"I repeat, Madame, no charges have been made against him."

Guillaume's next step was an examination of both Connie King and Jean Barbat. Of the missing man, Connie King had few kind things to say. She had always feared his tempers and threats and had cut him out of her life entirely. As for the afternoon of his disappearance, she could account for herself. She had been with Barbat every moment. The former secretary confirmed this. Why had he and Izoard visited Davin? No special reason. Just a friendly visit. Guillaume had drawn a blank.

He was now up against a blank wall. Had the American gangster been murdered at all? Wasn't he perhaps in hiding? If he had been murdered, who was guilty? Had his American rivals got him, after all? Had Connie King herself done it through hatred and malice? Or Barbat? The possibilities were endless. Who knows what motives, what reasons

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for revenge may have prompted one of Wall's numerous acquaintances to destroy him? A cocaine addict perhaps, debauched by Wall. A gambler, ruined through one of his tips. Did Izoard have any motive? Did Davin? Perhaps. . . .

The first question, at least, was answered in an abrupt and startling manner. There could no longer be any doubt that Wall was a dead man. Acting on the statement of residents in the Triel Bridge district, who said they had seen a man toss a heavy bundle into the Seine River, the police dragged the river. They found the body, half-naked, torn by three bullets. It was Wall, all right. The police were familiar with that pinched, pasty face. But here they struck another snag. The black sedan—if there was any connection—had been found ten miles from Triel Bridge. The clothes were unearthed in another direction, in St. Cucufa Woods. How account for these geographical differences?

It was then that Guillaume, reëxamining the blood-stained clothes, noticed two initials in the collar of the smaller shirt: D. B. He consulted an assistant: "B? That could stand for Barbat."

"You forget that Barbat's first name is Jean. Why not J. B.?"

"True, true. You know. I—" Guillaume stopped dead. His eyes lit up. "Have you ever heard of a man using his wife's middle name?"

"As an alias? Yes, that is certainly done."

"It seems to me that Guy Davin's Russian wife has a name starting in B."

"What, you mean—!"

"I have had my eye on that young man from the beginning. Fetch him to my office."

The officer nodded and strode off. Guillaume issued a number of instructions. Wall's body was to be taken to the mortuary. The bullets were to be removed and carefully examined by a ballistics expert.

Fate was dusting her wings, but Guy Davin didn't hear them.

He went with the officer without demur. . . .

II

"DAVIN," said Guillaume, when the young man was seated before his desk, "why did you kill Richard Wall?"

The boy showed no surprise. He smiled even, that cynical, careless smile which was never to leave his face. "Yes, I suppose the game's up. Good work, M'sieur. I watched your detection from afar and admired it."

"Do you care to tell us about it or must we—?"

"No, I'll talk."

And talk he did, talked for a long time until dusk had stolen into the little office. When he was through, Guillaume was in possession of as strange a criminal drama as ever confronted the French Sûreté. In substance, it was this:

In December, 1931, the Davin family was in desperate straits. The father had lost every cent. For two days neither Davin's mother nor his wife had had anything to eat. He set out that morning, December 16, vaguely bent on procuring money, no matter how. Quite by accident he ran into Wall. That was encouraging. Wall always had some shady scheme on, maybe some stolen car to be disposed of or some cocaine to be delivered. He would give Davin work and money. But the boy was doomed to disappointment. Wall was in not much better condition financially than he. In fact, he had just been forced to borrow $300.

The two friends joined up with Barbat and Izoard and lunched together. Perhaps something might turn up. Dur-

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ing the meal, Wall asked Davin to get francs for him and the boy obligingly started off for a bank. Actually, he got 7,500 francs. Instead of returning immediately to the restaurant he decided to act upon a plan which had come to him during the meal. He bought himself a Browning revolver, then he drove in his black sedan—a stolen car he had owned for some time—to the Bois de Boulogne and fired the revolver once or twice to assure himself it was in good working order. He returned to the restaurant, handed Wall the balance of 7,000 francs.

The meal was over. Izoard and Barbat went their own way and Davin invited Wall to take a little drive. The gambler accepted. They drove towards the St. Cucufa Woods district. Davin's mind was set now. Waiting a moment when no cars or passers-by were in sight, he whipped out the revolver and pulled the trigger rapidly three times. Wall slumped against the door, spraying the car with his blood.

Davin drove around with his grisly passenger until evening had fallen. Then, passing over Triel Bridge, he opened the door and shoved Wall's body into the Seine. First, he had removed the 7,000 francs and also the dead man's clothes. He then noticed that his own shirt was stained with blood. He stopped at a garage and bought two cans of gasoline, paying for it with one of the 1,000-franc bills stolen from Wall. Driving back to St. Cucufa woods, he made a mound of Wall's clothes and his own shirt, as well as the blood-stained backseat cushion, soaked them with gasoline and ignited them. At that moment, someone approached and Davin was forced to drive hastily away. As a result, the clothes were not properly lit. They were only half-burned.

Near his home in Neuilly, on the Rue Laborde, he abandoned his car and turned in. It was ten o'clock. He gave his wife 4,000 francs, explaining it was his commission on a stock sale.

But his grisly work was not yet finished. He rose the following morning at six and wrenched the license from the first car he found. He then returned to the black sedan on the Rue Laborde, substituted the stolen license and drove towards Vincennes. In a remote part of the woods, he crashed his car against a tree, leaping off the running board just before the collision. At last he was done. He had nothing more to fear—or so he thought.

But when he returned home a ghastly surprise awaited him. His mother, by what intuition and suspicion and guesses he could not understand, sensed what he had done.

"My poor boy," she murmured softly, "what foolish thing have you done now?"

He understood at once that he couldn't conceal his crime from her. Calmly, without flinching, he confessed the whole, sordid story. He was sorry she had found him out. In his own, strange way he loved this pitiable woman. But for his crime he had no remorse, only a fearful, cynical pride. He ended his confession with the remark: "It's nothing to kill a man, mother, if you only knew."

And he showed her the revolver with which he had murdered Wall. He even showed her how it worked! In the end he gave it to her, as a gift, a memento!

The next day, when Commissaire Guillaume spoke to the frantic mother, she tried to hide her knowledge that her son was a murderer.

Davin's formal arrest took place just forty-four hours after the black sedan had been found and Richard Wall's body had been recovered from the Seine.

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NOT since Henri Landru was tried for the insurance murders of his numerous wives was the court of assizes at Versailles invaded by such a frenzied mob. No less a personage than W. Somerset Maugham, the great English novelist, was among the spectators. And, of course, the mysterious veiled lady, who never misses a trial before the jury of the Seine-et-Oise district, was present.

To the audience, the most amazing phase of the proceedings was the smiling insouciance of the defendant. Always that twisted, callous grin remained on his face. Neither the hysterical sobbing of his wife, loving and loyal, nor the despair of his mother appeared to trouble him.

He was defended by the famous lawyers, Maurice Garçon and André Constant. President Devise presided.

Throughout the trial, the boy indulged in sallies of grim wit which gained him the hatred of everyone present.

"Is it true," he was asked, "that you hit your father, threw dishes at your mother?"

"I don't remember . . . anyway, I don't want to contradict mother."

"Why did you smash a window while you were in jail?"

"Oh, I had my personal reasons."

"When you stole a car for Wall you acted as chauffeur, dressed in livery, a cap—?"

"And gloves, don't forget the gloves."

"You undressed the body after the crime?"

"How do you know? Did Wall tell you?"

At all this the spectators laughed, but they stared strangely at Davin's young, slim neck.

Some of his other statements were not so amusing. He confessed freely to his crime, elaborating on all its details and, in the process, he generously slandered all his friends and acquaintances. Barbat, he accused of selling cocaine. He also insisted that Izoard had participated in the theft of cars and Davin had placed his garden at his disposal for the purpose of altering their appearance. Both of these charges were strenuously denied and the police never troubled to pursue them.

A friend of Davin's, one Pierre Velini, who took the witness stand as a character witness, introduced a mysterious note. "Davin," he said, "was a weakling, badly trained by the evil characters he eventually made his boon companions. I do not believe that he murdered for the wretched sum involved. There is something else one will never know, because he will never reveal it. Guy Davin has a secret!"

Whatever it was it was not disclosed, but it added a romantic dash to the character of the defendant. If he had not murdered for money, the audience speculated, then what was the motive? Was it a case of the gangster from the banks of the Hudson being taken for a ride by a gangster from the banks of the Seine?

Altogether Davin's behavior on trial was so extraordinary, his levity, his cold-bloodedness, his utter disregard for the feelings and opinions of others, so curious, that the question of his sanity was raised. He was examined and the opinion of the pathologists who studied him is sharply revelatory of the temper of French law and medicine:

> He is a moral madman, but not a legal one. The moral madman is simply a rebel against society; he does not distinguish good from evil, right from wrong. But he is not a lunatic; that is, he is an individual capable of handling himself in the world without having to be locked

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up according to the terms of the law of 1838.

Davin is a moral madman only since he behaves normally in ordinary life; his moral sense is simply deficient. He resembles all the criminals of habit, the "instinctive perverts," who are checked neither by social laws, morals, consideration for others. From the age of six, he stole and showed himself "an instinctive pervert." In other words, a future criminal, of whom one could have said then with confidence: He will steal. He will kill.

This prophecy in reverse was startlingly confirmed by the Davins' family physician who testified that he had long ago warned Mme. Davin that her son would surely become a criminal.

President Devise was ready to ask the jury to retire. He listened patiently to the last defense witnesses, alienists who sought to place the blame for Davin's crimes on his upbringing, his environment, his associations, well-meaning friends who testified to his kindness and gentleness.

As it was, these witnesses saved Davin's neck. The jury, by a vote of seven to five granted him extenuating circumstances. Monsieur Camboulives, Procurator of the Republic, rose to demand the death penalty. "Ten months before the crime," he thundered, "the Commissaire of Police of Neuilly pleaded with his family to have him locked up. They didn't do it and there he is, auto thief, tennis champion and star of murder—there is Guy Davin!"

He was interrupted by a heart-rending incident. Davin's mother struggled to her feet and tried to speak, but the words were choked back by her tears. The President, seeing her, rapped on the bench with a blood-red paper cutter and ordered her from the court. She was dragged away, screaming and hysterical.

Camboulives continued: "The penal problem is a problem of action. Do I even have to pronounce the penalty that I demand for Davin? It is the extreme penalty which you, gentlemen of the jury, should have the courage to exact. Don't send him to prison, whence he has the will to escape." And turning menacingly towards Davin: "Davin in a few hours your destiny will be fixed."

In this terrible moment, Davin had the arrogance to glance at the clock and smile, as though to see just how long he would have to wait.

"If the jury condemns you, Davin, you will tremble then!" The attorney shouted.

The boy folded his arms and shouted back: "I will not tremble!"

A shiver passed through the courtroom.

III

IT was now Maurice Garçon's turn to save his client's neck if he could. He addressed himself to the jury: "Here is a criminal such as one has never seen, unbalanced, marked from birth with the seal of crime. He lived in Paris as in the jungle and in that jungle he met unique beasts—the gangster Richard Wall and his sinister companions.

"We are no longer living in a day when we kill maniacs. We have asylums in France, but we have prisons, too. Put Davin in prison, out of society, anywhere."

The President asked Davin if he had anything to say.

"Nothing," replied the boy.

The jury then withdrew to consider the sentence. They returned in 36 minutes. He was condemned to penal servitude for life on Devil's Island. Between this and death there was little choice. "Life" is merely a euphemism on Devil's Island.

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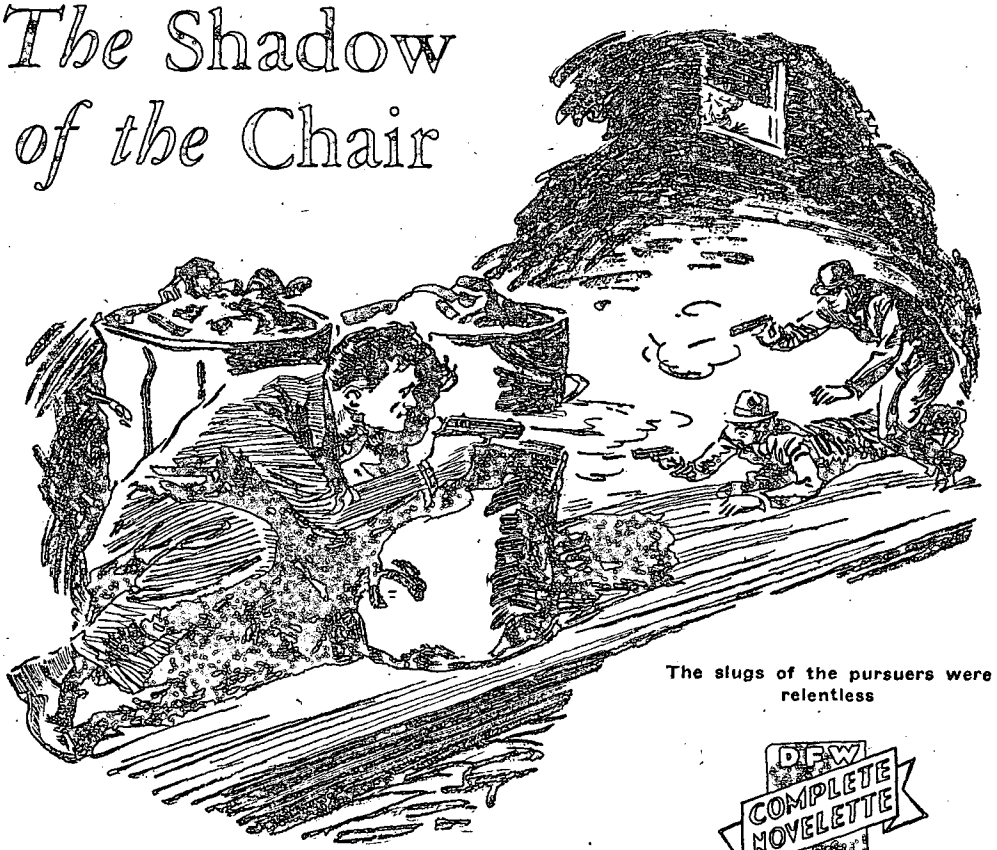
The Shadow of the Chair



The slugs of the pursuers were relentless

By Paul Ernst

CHAPTER I

The Corpse in 512

THE traffic light turned from red to green. The taxi started across the deserted intersection. Down the crossing street, against the red, silently flashed a low black sedan. With no pause for the change in lights, it raced for the corner.

The taxi driver swore; a woman coming out of the corner drugstore screamed and covered her face with her hands.

Just a driver trying to beat the lights, and plunging in his black coffin of a car toward a lone taxi.

But the passenger in the taxicab knew that this was no ordinary accident. If he had not sensed it instinctively, he would have known at this moment when his quick gaze revealed four men, grim and crouched, bracing themselves in the sedan for the coming shock.

Private Detective Ballard Had Only Six Hours to Prove the Innocence of His Pal Condemned to the Chair—and He Had to Defeat the Interference of Both Cops and Crooks

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The taxi driver slammed down on his brakes. It was the wrong move. It stopped the slowly rolling cab directly in the path of the sedan. And that sedan had a bumper like the cowcatcher of a locomotive.

"*Step on it!*" yelled the cab's passenger.

The driver lost his head. He stepped on the accelerator—and choked his motor. The passenger wrenched at the door-handle, was still wrenching when the sedan struck.

Like a black bolt of lightning it hit the side of the cab. The driver screamed, slumped over the wheel with a broken jaw and a cracked head. Glass shrieked into pieces. Echoes of the hollow *thunk* of a major accident resounded down the street.

Out of the cab the passenger flew like a stone from a sling, catapulted through the door he had just opened. After him tumbled a suitcase, which ripped open to spill shirts and socks and pajamas on the street.

The man paid no attention to the suitcase. He lit on his chest, rolled over, bounced up with tigerish quickness and began running.

Behind him, the sedan backed away from the ruined cab, with its headlights smashed but otherwise unimpaired. Three men got out of the sedan and began racing after the taxi passenger. The fourth slammed into gear and got the sedan away down the street.

The three pursuers got out guns. They began firing, calmly, deliberately, one halting to aim while the other two spread and kept on with the chase; a second halting in his turn while the first and the third deployed.

The quarry zigzagged to combat the new threat of death. Slugs zinged off the building walls beside him, ricocheted from the sidewalk behind him.

Now above the sound of shots sounded a police whistle. The cops were out to investigate what was happening.

The fleeing man swore. He was calm—panting for breath, forehead beaded with the sweat of effort—but cool and collected. His blue eyes looked like ice chips under his heavy black brows. His powerful shoulders were moving with the swift, beamlike action of a mechanical thing as he got the last, least exhausting play of his muscles into his sprinter's effort. A bad man to chase, even if you had a gun in your hand and two armed buddies by your side!

THE police whistle had sounded from behind. An answer shrilled ahead, was joined by another whistle. The three pursuers sent more slugs whistling toward their quarry.

The man with the ice-blue eyes saw two big ashcans, full, in line with his flight. He dropped behind the end one and whipped out a gun.

Lead sang back down the street, in answer to the flashes of the three guns behind him. The three men dropped to the sidewalk. The hunted one emptied his clip, then cursed as something tore half his coat sleeve away. The slugs of the hunters were drilling through the two filled cans.

Now the wail of a squad car sounded ahead. Police ahead, killers behind.

The man's breath hissed between his teeth. Across the street the buildings were low. Over their roofs could be seen the looming shadow of a six-story apartment building, rising on the next street behind them. That building was the man's goal, almost reached when the taxi was wrecked.

Lights played on the man, the headlights of a police car, bolstered by the

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heavy beam of a spotlight. The shooting from down the street abruptly stopped; but the man behind the ash-cans knew that his hunters were still lurking near, out of sight of the squad car but ready to kill him if the chance presented itself.

He gazed at the building across the rooftops. Like a jack-in-the-box he shot up from behind the cans and raced across the street.

A police-defying fusillade burst from the guns of the three down the street, but the slugs went wild as the men were caught by surprise. Yells to halt came from the squad car. The man paid no attention.

Up the front of the building across the street zigzagged a fire escape. The man hit the sidewalk, leaped like a panther, caught the upswung platform of the escape, and the next moment was swarming up the iron stairs to the roof. There he vaulted the parapet and disappeared.

The squad car slammed to a stop beside the building as he did so. Two cops came running around the corner.

"He can't get out of this block, whoever he is," snapped a thin, tall man from the squad car. "Watch the block, one to a corner. Try to find the others who were shooting. I'll follow that guy over the roof."

The two uniformed cops and two detectives from the car ran to their stations, making it impossible for any man to leave the block unseen. The third detective, the tall, thin man, with some difficulty got onto the escape and charged up toward the roof.

THE man who had started all this, and who ran from cops and crooks alike, crossed the roof from front to rear like a fleeting shadow. He weighed a hundred and eighty-seven, but he moved as lightly as a leaf in the wind.

As he went, his eyes kept fastening on the six story building ahead. In there was a haven. In there, on the fifth floor, was a friend and co-worker.

A sixteen foot gap yawned between the roof he was on and the next. He cleared it with two feet to spare, raced on, got to the cliff-wall of the building which was his goal.

He raced soundlessly along the sheer wall to the side of the building, swung out and over and grasped the iron bars of the building escape. Up he started. The roar of a police Special sounded behind him and slugs splattered against the brick. The man went calmly on, convinced that he was unseen in his dark suit against the dark wall, and that the man behind was firing blindly.

A steel door leading from the fire escape to the hall of the apartment building barred his way on the fifth floor. He worked at the lock with fingers no less sure for being lightning-swift. The door swung open.

The man went to a door on the corridor numbered 512. He knocked . . . listened . . .

There was no answer. The man frowned, breathing rapidly, but cold and collected as though making a social call instead of seeking a haven for his life after finishing a perilous race. He looked at the lock. This one was more complicated, a difficult thing to pick.

He tried the door, and his frown deepened when he found the door opened to his touch.

He saw that the room was dark within. His ice-blue eyes narrowed. Darkness! An opened door!

He slid silently into the room, closed the door behind him, crouched in the dark. Something was wrong. Badly wrong!

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"Jim," he whispered.

The whisper died in the dark, silent room. The man crept forward from the door. He felt his way with outstretched hand in the pitch blackness.

His fingers touched the edge of a table—recoiled as warm, sticky fluid adhered suddenly to them.

"Jim!"

The man leaned down, touched a warm, moveless arm. He swore between his teeth and leaped back to the door. There was a light-switch by the jamb. His fingers found it, pressed it.

"My God!"

The room was like a slaughter-house, a shambles.

Beside a table, which was splattered with blood, lay a dead man. Not only dead, but mutilated. The man with the ice-blue eyes breathed heavily through his nose as he looked.

The man on the floor had had his face so chopped up that there was no face left. Streams of red came from his outflung hands, the source of the streams being ten fingers with the last joints neatly cut off leaving ten stumps.

This bloody room was the haven the man had raced to find; this poor, mutilated corpse the co-worker who was to help him.

"My God!"

The man's own mother could not have identified that face. But the man with the ice-blue eyes knew who it was.

HE stared at the dead man a moment longer. Then his square jaw protruded. He turned from the corpse and began going swiftly, methodically through the single room.

He ripped the bed apart, felt mattress and pillows, examined blankets and sheets. He flipped the pictures from the walls, and rolled up the rugs. He opened the drawers of dresser and bureau, paused as he saw a slip of paper in a collar-box.

The paper, unrolled, read: Cavanaugh, 193 West End Ave. That was all.

With eyes narrowed to slits, the man started on with his search, then crouched beside the dresser. Voices came from the hall.

"You say you haven't been able to get any answer from the bird in 512? Well, we'll look in there first."

An anxious but suave voice said: "Who are you hunting? What has he done?"

"Don't know who or what," replied the other voice. "Guy ran when we told him to stop, after firin' a lot of shots at something. We saw him climb the escape into this building. We'll go through every apartment — but we'll start with 512 as long as you say something seems to be wrong in there."

There was a loud knock on the door. The man crouched by the dresser was galvanized to action. He leaped to the window, looked out.

Six stories straight down. He looked around. No place to hide in the one-room apartment.

The dead man seemed to stare mockingly at him from eye-sockets which, in the ruin of the face, no longer held eyes.

A key was inserted in the lock of the door. The man drew a deep breath, then lit a cigarette.

The door opened.

A uniformed cop, a tall, thin man who was obviously a detective, and a short, plump man who was equally obviously the building manager, stared at the man with the blue eyes across the bloody corpse.

"Gawd," breathed the cop.

"Got him red-handed," snapped the detective.

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The manager said nothing; his eyes glazed after a look at the thing on the floor and he reeled back into the hall, to shiver there with the nausea blood inspires in some people.

The man standing beyond the corpse drew in a breath of smoke, exhaled it.

"Looks bad," he said. "But if you'll let me talk a minute—"

"Frisk him!" rasped the detective, drawing his gun and covering the man while the cop circuitously approached him.

The man held his hands up. The smoke spiralling up from the cigarette he held did not waver. The cop took a gun from the man's shoulder-holster.

"Gawd," repeated the patrolman, "he's a cool one—for a guy on his way to the electric chair."

"Don't be a damn fool!" snapped the man, lowering his arms as the cop stepped away with the gun. "I didn't kill this fellow. You know about when I got in here. Could I have killed him, and chopped him up that way, between then and now? And where's the knife I used? And if I did it, wouldn't I look like a butcher?"

"Your shoes and pants legs are bloody enough," rapped out the detective.

"Sure, I stepped in the blood before I turned the light on in here. It was dark—"

"Aw, cut it and come on," growled the cop, advancing with handcuffs.

"Wait!"

The man's voice was so urgent that the cop stopped. "That body's still warm, but not warm enough to pin a rap on me. The man's been dead at least a half hour. Use sense now, and let me talk."

The tall, thin detective chewed his lip. Then, gun covering the other man steadily, he jerked his head at the cop.

"Look around while I let this guy spill his guts. Go ahead, you."

The man with the ice-blue eyes ground his cigarette out in the near ash-tray while the detective watched narrowly to see that no tricks were tried.

He looked at the watch on his wrist.

"Ten-forty," he said. "In six hours and twenty minutes a man dies—if you don't believe what I tell you. So listen close and get this straight."

CHAPTER II

Frame-Up

HE handed a badge and a bill fold to the detective.

"First I'll identify myself. I'm Hugo Ballard, private detective, from Chicago. That . . . thing . . . on the floor was my partner, Jim Doyle. You can check up on him through his dental work. That's about all that's left to check on!

"Three weeks ago we got a call from New York to come here at once and do some work for Arthur Miles."

The tall, thin man started a little.

"Yeah, Arthur Miles," the Chicago detective repeated. "The guy that's in the death house now, slated to be electrocuted tomorrow at sunrise for the murder of his uncle, Eric Standish. When it looked in court like Art Miles was going to take it, he wired Jim and me to come here and clear him. Because he was framed."

"Boloney!" said the New York detective.

"Framed," Hugo Ballard repeated. "And he wanted Jim and me to make a last minute effort to find out who'd slipped him the rap, and why. The why is easy—Eric Standish left four million bucks in his will to a niece and two nephews, Art Miles being one of the nephews. The *who* is harder."

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"Listen," snapped the tall, thin detective, "if you think—"

"Shut up," said Ballard, glancing at his watch. "I had a hen on in Chi and couldn't get away at once. Jim Doyle left first. I got one letter from him. There was a frame, all right. Jim had sniffed it, but didn't know anything definite yet. Then I got a wire, this morning, to come on at once. I hired a plane, got to the landing field not quite an hour ago—and found out there were guys interested in keeping me from working on the case.

"A black sedan wrecked the taxi I was in, just a couple blocks away. I ran and three birds from the sedan chased after me. All of us shot. That's what you heard when you turned the prowl car after us. Then I got away and came in here—"

"To find a guy already dead, huh?" the New York detective said. "Nuts! Your yarn's so full of holes it wouldn't hold potatoes."

"Yes?" said Ballard softly, his eyes glinting.

"Yes. First place, you're working for a guy that's going to be fried at five tomorrow morning as sure as five is going to come. That means you'll get no fee—"

"Money doesn't enter into this."

"Oh, no? A shamus who works for love! I suppose you and Miles were buddies in France or something?"

"You've hit it," said Ballard, lips barely moving with the words.

"Horsefeathers! In the second place, you don't try to work with us—nor this Jim Doyle, either, if he is Jim Doyle. You leave the cops clear out—"

"Sure I leave the cops out," snapped Ballard. "What would you do if I asked for help? The Miles case is closed, as far as you're concerned. The court has judged him guilty, it's all over. I've got to work alone—and so did Jim. And Jim found out something and got murdered for it."

"Why'd you run back there when we told you to stop?"

"I DIDN'T want to be held for questioning. I've got about six hours to clear up a four months' old murder case that I know nothing of. Besides I didn't want to be shot out from under your noses by the guys that found out Jim had wired me and who were out to get me before I mixed in."

"Well, you're going to be held for questioning. We run into you beside a stiff that's carved up like a lamb for market, and you think you won't be held!"

For the first time Ballard's iron composure cracked a little. Sweat came out on his forehead. His voice was pleading. "I can't be held! There's an innocent man in the death cell—"

"Sure, I know," jeered the New York dick. "Put it to music. I don't even know if your name's Ballard, or if you bumped the real Ballard off and took his stuff—"

"Oh, oh!" came the cop's voice suddenly from the niche in which the kitchenette was located. "I've got something."

He turned toward the detective, holding cautiously by the blade a bloody butcher knife. The detective glared at Ballard. "That'll fix your clock, I guess. There'll be prints on the handle. We'll just put you on ice till we can lift 'em and compare 'em with yours."

Ballard drew a deep breath and looked at his watch again. Ten minutes of eleven. And at five in the morning Art Miles, who had crawled

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in mud with him over France's bloody battlefields, would take the current in the electric chair!

The lights overhead in the room were on. A floor lamp and a lamp on the bloodstained table were on. Any one he struck out with a chair or a thrown missile, would leave two others still illuminating the room.

An electric clock ran silently on the table under the lamp. Its cord was not as heavy as the standard light cord; and it trailed from table to wall-outlet not far from Ballard's feet.

Without moving a muscle in warning, Ballard held his breath. Then he dropped to the floor like a flash.

The New York detective shouted. His gun blazed out. The slug went over Ballard's head and next instant the room was plunged into darkness as Ballard snapped the cord to the clock and blew the apartment fuse with the resulting short circuit.

"Get him!" yelled the detective to the cop, blazing himself at the spot where Ballard had crouched.

But Ballard was no longer there. From darkness in a near corner he heard a slug rip the floor where he had been, and heard both men leap for the spot.

He threw his pocket-knife at the window. The tinkle of glass sent both men jumping.

"The window—the fool's going to kill himself—"

Ballard leaped to the door, crashed it open, and knocked down the building manager as he swung into the corridor.

The lights out here were unaffected by the short circuit. They shone pitilessly down on Ballard as he raced for the steel door leading from the corridor to the fire escape.

Plainclothesman and uniformed patrolman shot together as Ballard banged open the door and got to the escape. The door slammed shut and when they got to it and opened it, Ballard was nowhere to be seen.

The two went to the lobby of the building, to phone headquarters and have a description of Ballard, charged with murder, broadcast to all the police cars in the city.

At ten minutes after eleven a big man in a faded blue suit and a frayed topcoat, both too small around the chest and shoulders, walked into a lunch room six blocks away from the apartment building. The man had ice-blue eyes and a square, bluish jaw. It was Ballard.

He had gone up the escape instead of down, as the cops had expected, and had ridden a guy-wire from the roof to a smokestack spiring from the adjacent roof. Then down to the street, descending almost in front of a second hand store.

The proprietor, closed for hours and only there while he took inventory, hadn't wanted to open his door. Ballard had persuaded him to. Then the man had seen Ballard's ripped coat sleeve and the blood on his shoes and trousers, and had started to yell.

Ballard had knocked him out, as considerately as possible, taken a coat and suit, and left his own things behind. He had no money to leave—the detective still had his wallet, handed him for identification purposes. Some day he'd come back and reimburse the proprietor. Now—he had no time even to think of such things.

Time! Time! Hours fleeting by till the death-current was sent through an innocent man!

But time is often saved by seemingly wasting some of it in thought; so Ballard had flipped off the street car

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he had caught, and come to this lunch room to think things over.

He got a cup of coffee and carried it from the counter to a table. He sat with his back to the street window, hat brim pulled low and coat collar pulled high.

Arthur Miles, one of three beneficiaries of a four million dollar will, had been convicted on overwhelming evidence of murdering the uncle who had left the four millions. Framed. By whom? One of the other two beneficiaries, of course. These were another nephew of the dead millionaire, Thompson Rand, and a niece, Dorothy Standish.

"Very nice," Ballard half smiled to himself. "But in six hours I can't go through the private lives of Dorothy Standish and Thompson Rand and see which is the most logical suspect—and then get proof enough to clear Art. Got to have a short cut."

He remembered Jim Doyle's telegram, which he had committed to memory before destroying. "A. M. framed all right. Got hot tip but it needs two to handle. Come at once. 512 Hollywood Apts. Jim."

Ballard's fist slowly clenched. Well, he had come—and had been met by hired killers, proving that Jim's wire had been traced and the person who had really murdered Eric Standish and later framed an innocent man, had been put on guard.

He had come, and he had found—that thing weltering in a pool of blood in room 512 of the Hollywood Apartments.

Ballard beat back the red mist of rage in his brain, and snapped into cold calculation. He drew out the slip of paper he had found in Doyle's collar-box; the one possible aid he had in his six hour search.

"Cavanaugh. 193 West End Ave."

He gulped his coffee and went to the phone booth. He picked up a Manhattan book.

"Richard A. Cavanaugh, 193 West End Avenue."

He dialled a number. A man's voice answered.

Ballard made his voice hoarse and tremulous.

"Listen, this is . . ." He banged the telephone twice with his balled hand, gasped, strangled. "For God's sake . . . Dick . . . the cops . . . get away . . ."

He hung up, hurried from the booth. The man behind the lunch counter was looking at him curiously, had heard some of the commotion in the booth.

Ballard left some of the small change in his pockets and ran from the place.

He jumped into a cab near the curb. "193 West End Avenue," he snapped, "and step on it."

The cab got there in four minutes.

"No! Don't pull up in front of the entrance. Wait here, just around the corner."

The cab stopped around the corner from the address, and Ballard watched the door of 193, which was a smaller, more sleek building than the Hollywood Apartments. He watched the little timepiece on his wrist, too, noting with set teeth how the second hand marched around its small circle.

Twenty-three minutes past eleven.

MILES away, a man paced up and down in a prison cell. It was a cell in Death Row.

Magazines littered the iron bunk, and papers. And there was a pint bottle of Scotch. Nothing of metal or wood that might conceivably be used for the purpose of suicide; but plenty of small luxuries not usually found in a cell. For the man was to die at five

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in the morning, a scant five hours and a half away.

Now and then a guard walked past the barred door, not only to make sure the prisoner did not break the bottle and try to cut his wrists with it, but also to see if there was anything he could bring him. For he liked Arthur Miles, convicted of the murder of Eric Standish, and would be impersonally sorry to see him go to his death at sunrise.

But Miles neither touched the bottle nor asked the guard for any favors. A tall, slender man of thirty-six, with eyes now deep-sunken in his pallid face, he walked the floor of his cell mechanically, monotonously—and waited.

No word from Jim Doyle. No word from Hugo Ballard, in Chicago. Nothing. Only memories.

A gun with his fingerprints on it. His fingerprints on the doorknob of his uncle's bedroom in the big house on Park Avenue to which he had a key. Blood on the sleeve of a coat in a closet of his apartment.

An alibi shot to pieces. A jury; and a judge, saying: "I hereby sentence you . . ."

Miles moistened his pallid lips, and paced his cell. No power under heaven could save him now. It had been a belated, futile gesture to wire Jim and Hugo. What could they do on a case four months old, and with so little time?

CHAPTER III

The Guy from Chicago

AS Ballard sat waiting tensely in the cab a sound came to his ears that made him jerk his head up sharply. The far off sound of a police siren.

Of course the siren might not have anything to do with him. But he knew better than that, knew he was the object of the car wailing its way toward him from afar.

"Quick work," he muttered, with impersonal admiration.

The lunch room attendant, hearing some of the things he'd said in the phone booth, had called the cops. They had traced his phone call and followed to this address. Now . . .

Ballard sat there, one eye on his watch, the other on the door of 193. The cab driver turned in his seat.

"That siren got anything to do with you?" he jerked out.

"Do I look like a crook?" Ballard snapped. He clenched his hands, as the siren sounded nearer. He was not going to leave here till something developed from that phone call! "I'm waiting for a friend . . ."

A man came from the building entrance. He walked slowly, sedately, till he got onto the sidewalk where he could no longer be seen by any one behind him in the lobby.

Then he ran. He quickly jumped into a roadster parked down the block from the cab.

"There he is," said Ballard. "Follow that roadster. There's twenty in it if you keep it in sight." When and if, he added to himself, I get my wallet back from the New York police force.

The cab started with a jolt. After the roadster it swirled, with a block interval to keep the man in the roadster from discovering too easily that he was followed.

The police siren behind seemed to wail with undiminished loudness.

Across town the roadster fled, crowding traffic lights, taking desperate chances in an effort to save a few seconds. The following cab lost a little distance; lost a little more.

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Then the roadster stopped before an old red brick building and the man at the wheel got out almost before the car had stopped rolling.

"Park around the block on the next street," Ballard said.

"How about my dough—"

"Wait here. I'll be out in a minute, and I may come in a hurry."

Ballard left the protesting driver. Almost on the heels of the man from the roadster, he swung into the vestibule of the red brick building. The inner door was just closing, delayed by the cushioning action of the hydraulic door-stop that kept it from slamming.

Ballard thrust his foot against it. Through the glass of the door he could see the back of a man who was leaping up the first flight of stairs. He opened the door and followed, as soon as the man had disappeared around the first bend. As he went he felt mechanically at his empty shoulder holster.

HE might come out of here in a hurry, he had told the cab driver. Well, that was true. But he might come out, if he had actually succeeded in flushing significant game from cover with the aid of the address found in Jim's room, with red leaking from bullet holes in a dozen mortal spots.

He heard a frenzied knock on a door on the top floor, and then heard the door flung open.

"What—"

"Shut up and let me in! There's hell to p—"

The door slammed. Ballard went on up, and located it as the first door on the right hand side of the top landing.

Ballard chewed his lip as he halted before the door and tried to hear what those behind it were saying. He had to hear what was said in there; had to get in. But he was unarmed, and there were at least two men in the room behind the door.

He could hear nothing but a rumble of voices. He tried the door knob. It turned, but the door would not open. It had been locked after the frantic visitor had been admitted.

Now a word came to him clearly enough.

"Cops—"

He heard a far-off police siren wail, heard a rush in the room behind the door.

He bent to the lock. It was old-fashioned as was everything else about the building. He worked with it; with a little click the bolt slid back.

Ballard drew a deep breath. He might be stepping into a hole from which he'd never get out. Men might be silently watching that door, might have heard the click of the picked lock and have drawn guns to blast down any one entering. He longed for his own gun as an infatuated lover longs for his sweetheart.

With his face cold and expressionless, he opened the door an inch and peered in. He saw an apparently empty room . . .

He opened the door widely enough to enter.

The room behind the panel was empty. But through a doorway across the room, in another room, he could see a man's back. The man was at the window, peering covertly out.

"I don't hear 'em any more," this man said to some one out of Ballard's range of vision beside him. "That prowl car wasn't coming here."

Ballard softly closed the door behind him. The man at the window started to turn.

There was a screen in the corner of the room. Ballard leaped soundlessly

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for it. Behind was an electric plate and a few greasy culinary implements equipping a makeshift kitchenette.

Steps padded out. The man Ballard had seen at the window came into the room. Filing behind him were three other men. Ballard could see through the crack in the hinged center of the kitchenette screen.

ONE of the men was panting, trembling. He was a thin, tubercular looking fellow with a pallid face and colorless blond hair. He still had on a topcoat, thrown open; and Ballard spotted him as the man who had sped here in the roadster. The other three men were older, tougher looking.

". . . think you're nuts, Whitey," one of the three concluded as they came into the room where Ballard crouched behind the flimsy screen. The speaker was a blocky individual with a brush mustache that looked ragged because of a scar on the left side of his lip where hair would not grow.

"I tell you," the anemic blond fellow burst out, "there's something screwy somewhere. What we ought to do is lam out of here—and out of town!"

"Wait." One of the others, a man with eyes that looked lidless because his sandy eyelashes were invisible, stared at the man Ballard had chased here. "Just what did the guy say to you over the telephone? Tell us again."

The man called Whitey slid into a chair. He looked up at the others dully.

"He choked out something about the cops, and yelled to beat it. And I heard something that might have been either shots or socks on the head with a copper's sap."

"And what did he call you?"

Whitey jerked his head up with a new look in his eyes.

"I never thought of that! He called me Dick. Not Whitey, but Dick."

The man with the lidless eyes slowly nodded. "Uh huh. And do any of us ever call you Dick? Your Ma may have named you Richard Cavanaugh, but you're Whitey to all of us. Not Dick."

Whitey leaped up.

"Then it's a plant! The cops *are* wise—"

"Shut up and sit down! Maybe it was a cop that called. But we won't get anywhere going off half-cocked. We'll talk this over."

"But right now, after that siren we heard, the cops might be ringing the block, laying a cordon—"

"I still say we won't get any place going off half-cocked. Why would a cop call you and scare you into getting out of 193 West End?"

"Maybe to follow me and see where I went," cried Whitey. "My God, I never thought of that!"

"So I see," said the other man slowly, dangerously. "You barge straight over here, not even trying to keep from being tailed, I'll bet, and give the rest of us dead away."

There was a flat, deadly silence, split at last by a sort of squeal from Whitey.

"I didn't mean—I never thought—"

"Skip it," said the other, thin lips barely moving with the words. "Pete, see if you can spot any dicks outside."

Ballard heard steps as one of the men went back to the other room to peer out a front window. After a minute the call came, "I don't see any, Chief."

Whitey sucked in his breath in an audible sigh. The man with the sandy eyelashes relaxed a little.

"Maybe it wasn't a cop that called

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you. Maybe it was—somebody else."

"Who?"

"The guy from Chi."

THERE was a babble of protest, led by a dark-haired man with a squint to his eyes and a gold front tooth that showed prominently when he opened his mouth.

"The shamus the other guy wired for? The dick we crashed in the taxi? He's out!"

"Yeah?" said the other. "We didn't get him, did we?"

"No, but the cops must have."

"How do you figure that?"

The dark-haired man grinned, showing his gold tooth.

"I didn't get time to tell you, Chief, but we fixed that guy's clock plenty! He got away from us, and got away from the dicks over the roof. But we know where he was goin'. To 512, to call on that flatfoot partner of his. Well, I slid away from you about then. And know what I did? Guess."

"It's under the middle shell," said the other with deadly irony. "You sap! This is no time for guessing games."

"I slipped into a phone booth and called the bird in 512."

"Well—"

"Well, look. The cops are around the building looking for Ballard, the guy from Chi. The switchboard gets a call for 512, knows the bird's in there and still can't raise him. The manager tells the cops there's something wrong—so they start looking in 512 first. They find Ballard with the stiff, and that fixes him plenty! They'll hold him for a week! Certainly till after tomorrow sunrise, which is all we're worried about."

Slowly the man with the lidless eyes nodded.

"You really have a head, and you really use it sometimes. Nice work, Squint. Ballard will be put on ice, all right. There's just one chance—the dicks might turn him loose as soon as the stiff is identified—"

"The stiff," said Squint, "won't be identified for a long time. Not the way Tony left him."

"His stuff? That'll have his moniker on it."

"He checked in there by the week as Mortimer Jones, to keep anybody from knowing he was Jim Doyle, private dick. He cut the J. D. marks off everything."

"There's his mug, or his prints. These shamuses have their prints registered."

"You can't take finger prints," said Squint with an evil grin, "where there ain't any fingers to print. And you can't identify a mug where there ain't a mug to identify. It'll be a long time before that dead guy is checked, and during that time Ballard will be where no one has to worry about him, and with a murder rap hanging over his head!"

"So that's how Tony left him!" said the other softly.

"That's how Tony left him."

Behind the screen, Ballard felt his skin crawl. This was Doyle, his partner, they were talking about!

Whitey spoke up again, his voice thin, desperate.

"This isn't getting us anywhere. You think the cops didn't give me the runaround over the phone. You check the guy from Chi out of the picture. Then who *did* phone me?"

Squint sucked his gold tooth. "Might have been Kit Jordan. She's got a funny idea of a joke—"

Whitey's voice, passionately bitter now, cut across his words.

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"That two-timing, double-crossing fluff-head! She's too busy in her Park Avenue penthouse to think up jokes. Anyhow, this was a man's voice—"

"Just a minute," came the voice of the man with the lidless eyes. There was a queer pitch to his voice. At the sound of it, a thick silence fell over the room.

BALLARD'S eyes narrowed. He peered out through the crack. His nostrils thinned and whitened. The lidless, reptilian eyes were staring at the bottom of the screen. There was a two-inch space there, between the bottom of the screen and the floor. The cold eyes travelled upward. They met Ballard's one eye in the crack.

The man's hand moved. Suddenly a blued automatic was in it. The automatic pointed squarely at the screen.

"Come out," he said.

Ballard moistened his lips. Four of them in the room. And he was unarmed.

The man called Pete, and Squint, drew their guns. The three automatics trained toward the screen.

"Don't shoot," babbled Whitey. "Maybe there *are* cops around. . . ."

"We'll soon know," snapped the man with the lidless eyes. "Come out, you. And come slow, with your hands up."

Ballard came out. But not slow, nor with his hands up.

He smashed the screen ahead of him like a shield, leaped sideways to avoid possible bullets, and landed on Squint.

Squint yelled something and snapped his gun up. Ballard's fist lashed out, cracked against the side of his face, and he went down. Whitey and Pete were on him now, overbearing him, forcing him to his knees. He flung an arm around the neck of each, squeezed with all the power of his thick shoulder muscles.

He was entirely at the mercy of the man with the lidless eyes if that individual cared to disregard the possible presence of cops in the neighborhood and shoot. But Ballard ignored the gun. If he was going out anyhow, he might as well go out fighting.

However, the other did not shoot. He used his gun in a more silent way. He lifted it high, flashed it down.

Ballard saw the blow coming, tried to duck, but could not because of the two he was gripping by the necks. The automatic's barrel rapped against his head.

It was an instantaneous knockout. Consciousness clicked off for him as though a switch had been turned. He sagged to the floor, bearing Pete and Whitey with him.

CHAPTER IV

Inquisition

BALLARD came back to consciousness as he had passed out. Consciousness clicked back on with a stinging pain in his side. He grunted, moved on the floor, and opened his eyes to see Pete with his foot drawn back for another kick at his ribs.

The kick was completed. Ballard bit his lips to keep back a groan, and sat up. The four glared down at him.

"So the guy from Chi is on ice," the man with the lidless eyes ground out to Squint. "He's in the station house charged with knocking off the bird back at 512 in the Hollywood Apartments! Isn't that nice?"

"Aw, how'd I know he could get away—" Squint began.

"Skip it. The thing now is to find out if he's here on his own, or if the dicks are playin' with him. And we'll

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find out, all right." He glared down at Ballard. "Get up on that chair."

Ballard remained seated.

"Get up there," repeated the head of the gang, jabbing his automatic toward Ballard's head.

"You won't use that popgun," said Ballard. "The noise—"

"That," the other cut him off, "is where you're cockeyed. If we're going to be grabbed, I'd rather be grabbed without you alive to spill the beans. Anyhow, there's ways out of this joint that would surprise you. Get on that chair."

Ballard got up, staggering a little with dizziness, and sat on the straight-backed chair. He kept his face expressionless as he stared at the four, but fine sweat appeared on his upper lip. He remembered his last look at Jim Doyle—face mashed to a grisly ruin, fingers amputated and stumps streaming red, to delay identification.

The man with the lidless eyes lit a cigarette with his left hand, holding his gun in his right.

"We'll have a little info out of you," he said. "Did you come here alone, or are the cops behind you?"

"I should answer," retorted Ballard, his heavy voice without a quiver. "As soon as you get what you want to know, I get bumped off."

The other man smiled a little. It was worse than a snarl.

"You'll answer. Come on—are you here on your own, or are there dicks standing in doorways outside?"

Ballard's lips shut tight. The man puffed on the cigarette, which was obviously not for pleasurable purposes. An angry red cone formed on the end of the cigarette.

He leaned rapidly forward and crushed the cone against the back of Ballard's hand. There was a sort of sizzling noise for an instant before the cigarette went out.

Ridges stood out along Ballard's jaw. His nostrils compressed in pain.

"I'm here with the cops," he said. "There's a squad car around the corner. There's two dicks at the front door and two in the back—"

"Let's get out of here!" squealed Whitey.

The other man sneered. "He's lying."

"How do you know? How would you know if he told the real truth or not. A guy'll say anything with a cigarette shoved—"

"I'll know," said the other man coldly. "Say, that cigarette shoving stunt gives me an idea. Wonder what it would feel like to have a lighted cigarette shoved up your nose?"

He pinched off the slightly moistened charred end of the cigarette and relit it. Another long red cone appeared rapidly on the end of the butt. Ballard stared at him with eyes that were icy blue holes in his face.

"Better not try that nose business," he said flatly.

THE man grinned bleakly. His gun crept a little closer to the side of Ballard's head. The other two moved their guns, too. Only Whitey did not hold an automatic on the big, blue-chinned man in the straight-backed chair.

"Now," said the man with the lidless eyes, bringing the cigarette-end close to Ballard's face, "give the answer, and give it right. I'm betting twenty to one you're here alone. I'm betting you're running from the cops yourself. But I want to know. We heard a prowl car awhile ago. Has that got anything to do with your being here?"

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"I don't like lighted cigarettes shoved up my nose," said Ballard. Drops of straw-colored moisture were forming around the burn on the back of his hand, but the hand did not quiver.

"What you like, and what you're going to get—" the man began.

The roar of his own gun interrupted his words. Ballard had moved like a striking snake; and in the same fraction of a second the alert automatic blazed out.

An eighth of an inch of Ballard's left ear-lobe disappeared. Powder stung his neck from the right, where Pete's gun had belched lead. Whitey was clawing for his gun.

Squint screamed like a tortured horse as Ballard's big right hand clamped over his gun wrist. At the same time Pete cursed and tripped in the rungs of the chair Ballard had kicked into his legs.

Ballard caught the gun Squint dropped from agonized, numbed fingers, and in the same sweeping move levelled it at the man with the lidless eyes who was backing deliberately away for a clear shot.

His gun and the other's cracked at the same instant. But while Ballard's left arm jerked and red came from a graze above the elbow, the other man coughed, spun slowly, and toppled to the floor with his abdomen a shattered mass of flesh.

A too-familiar whistle shrilled in front of the building. The cops! It came just as Whitey got his gun out, and as Pete kicked clear of the entangling chair rungs.

Whitey gasped, turned greenish as his eyes swept the room, the body of the man with the lidless eyes. He broke for the door, gun hanging limp in his hand.

Ballard kicked the automatic from Pete's hand and slammed him back into the overturned chair. Then, as steps pounded on the hall stairs outside, he ran for the side windows of the room.

Squint stopped nursing his injured arm and tried to trip him. Ballard knocked him down and out with a blow that mashed flesh and cartilage around the man's nose and mouth.

He went on to the side windows.

They opened onto an air-shaft between this building and the next. It was a crack scarcely three feet wide, with blackness beneath and a narrow strip of sky above.

He backed away and leaped into the other room to look out the front windows. There was a squad car in front, and a uniformed cop who shouted something to somebody as he saw Ballard's head for an instant at the window. Ballard went back to the other room. Pete was gone.

BALLARD cursed as he remembered the words of the man, now lying dead on the floor, to the effect that there were ways out of here that would surprise the cops. Pete, and probably Whitey, as soon as he had got out the door, had taken one of those ways. Ballard had misplayed badly in not remembering and forcing Pete to lead him out.

There was a banging at the door. Ballard heard a voice that he had last heard in Jim Doyle's room: "The cab-driver said he'd gone in this building. The dirty killer! And now he's probably popped off another guy. Bust the door down, Mike."

Ballard looked at the body of the man he had shot. He looked at the gun, Squint's gun, which he still held. There was a smash as the shoulders of "Mike" jammed against the door. The

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door happened to be unlocked; from Whitey's exit; but the police outside assumed it would naturally be barred and were taking no time to find out.

Ballard whipped out his handkerchief, wiped the gun butt. Holding the gun by the barrel in handkerchief-protected fingers, he leaped to the side of the unconscious Squint.

The door cracked down the center under another assault from outside. Ballard pressed the gun into Squint's limp hand and leaped away.

The door ripped off one hinge. Through the narrow aperture left by its sagging could be seen the saturnine face of the tall, thin detective who had cornered Ballard in Doyle's room, and the perspiring countenance of a harness bull.

One more lunge, and the door was down. The detective and two uniformed police leaped into the room.

The tall detective swore luridly as he saw the dead man, the unconscious man with the gun in his fist.

"Looks open and shut," said Mike, wiping his red face. "This guy," he jerked his thumb at the dead man, "socked the other guy in the mouth. The other guy plugged him."

"And then lay down and played dead till we busted in!" snapped the detective in disgust. "How about all the other shots? How about the phony dick from Chicago the cab-driver said came in here? Where's he?"

He leaped to the other room. Ballard was not in there. Nor was he in the room onto which the hall door opened. The man from Chicago was not in that apartment.

"He couldn't have got out the front windows," the New York cop rapped out! "Take a look at the side windows!"

Mike padded to the side windows.

"Nothin' here but a three-foot air-shaft. Couldn't have got out here."

"Look down. Play your flash. He might have tried it."

The patrolman switched on a flashlight and craned down over the window ledge. An exclamation came from his lips.

"He did try it! And fell! There's something at the bottom of the shaft that looks like a bundle of old clothes."

"You'd look worse than that if you fell forty feet down a three-foot shaft, bouncing from one side to the other like a tennis ball. After him. He may still be alive!"

The two in uniform barged out. The detective, cursing, bent over the still unconscious Squint, took the gun from his lax hand, and handcuffed him. He stepped to the other room where he had seen a telephone.

CHAPTER V

Shadow of Doom

TO the left of the window the cop had looked out, and a little above it, Ballard set his teeth as he jammed himself against the walls of the air-shaft so he would not fall.

His feet, rubber heels grinding into rough brick, were braced against the wall of the building adjacent to the one he had left. His shoulders were crammed against the opposite wall. Sheer pressure held him, an animate bridge, from falling. But the hold was a tenuous one.

He looked down. It was too dark to see the topcoat he had dropped; but he could imagine it lying at the bottom of the air-shaft, "like a bundle of old clothes," as the cop had said. And he could imagine himself lying on it or next to it in a few moments.

To his left, farther away from the

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open, lighted window, was a window leading into the next building. Ballard began to inch toward it, shifting first one foot and shoulder and then the other foot and shoulder as he strove to move and at the same time keep his hundred and eighty-seven pounds from sliding down the shaft like a brick down a chimney.

He got to the window, with his bent, straining knees aching and his hands dripping blood down the rough brick. There was a blank space in the building he had left at this point, with the window in the other building opening on bare wall. The panes of glass were so grimed that they looked as though they had grown a crust through the years.

Disregarding the noise in the peril of his position, Ballard thrust a foot through one of the panes. The glass showered into the darkness inside. He heard a cry of surprise from some one in the room he had just left.

He hooked his knee over the sill of the dark window, and slithered inside —just as glass from the upper pane showered at the slanting impact of a bullet from the window Ballard had swung through a second before the cops broke in.

He stumbled through the darkness of a vacant loft. His feet found a stairway going down.

He heard a shout from below: "Hey! There's nothing but an overcoat in the bottom of the shaft!" Then he heard an answering shout from the apartment across the way, "I know. He's in the next building. Get to the door!"

Ballard leaped down the stairs, risking a broken neck in the darkness in his effort to beat the patrolman to an exit.

In the death cell, miles away, the man condemned to die at sunrise paced back and forth. The guard leaned against the bars of the door.

"What time is it now?" Arthur Miles jerked out. His face was the color of ashes, but he managed to keep his voice reasonably steady.

"Twenty after twelve," the guard said.

"I . . . I think I'd like a Bible," said Miles.

The guard nodded. He had been rather expecting such a request. Most of 'em in here wanted Bibles and priests and everything else before the last dawn broke. Something about waiting to be led to the hot seat that cracked the nerve of the hardest boiled. Not that this guy was hard. He seemed a kind of a good egg, really. Too bad he was to fry in about four hours and a half.

"I'll get you a Bible," he said.

IN a dark doorway on Park Avenue Ballard stood unobtrusively in shadow and stared across the street. He was looking at a building on the door of which was the number 248. It was on the roof of number 248, the telephone book had told him, that a girl by the name of Katherine Jordan rented a penthouse. Kit Jordan, mentioned in the tone of a furious, jilted suitor, by Whitey Cavanaugh.

Ballard very much wanted to have a talk with this Kit Jordan.

He crossed the street—a big man in a wrinkled, second-hand suit, with blood-matted hair under his battered hat, with a ripped and reddened coat sleeve testifying to the recent caress of a bullet, and with a slowly bleeding ear-tip. He felt absently at his armpit, where a flat, weaponless holster rested futilely. But if his appearance and his weaponless state bothered him,

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it did not show in his level blue eyes or the set of his bluish jaw.

The building was on a corner. It had a front entrance with revolving doors and a smaller side entrance. Ballard went to the side entrance, and looked into the lobby through the plate-glass.

There was one man in the lobby, hatless, without an overcoat, evidently an employee of the place.

Ballard slipped in through the side door while the man's back was turned. He crouched behind a high-backed chair covered with elaborate red damask.

The man walked to the front door, peered absently out into the street.

Ballard went swiftly, soundlessly to the narrow stairs which reared beside the bronze elevator doors.

It was fourteen floors up to the roof. Breathing a little heavily, Ballard paused a moment outside the fine-grained walnut door opening into Kit Jordan's penthouse. Then he knocked softly.

A man's voice sounded in a moment: "Who is it?"

Ballard pitched his voice low, in a harsh whisper.

"It's me, Whitey. Let me in."

Hesitantly the door opened. A man stood in the threshold who looked like a moving picture butler turned crook. Small, close-set eyes burned in a florid face. A pompous abdomen protruded over a tight-laced belt.

"You know you're not wanted here any more—" the man began, peering out near-sightedly.

Then he realized his mistake. He started to shout, started to slam the door.

Ballard's big hands darted out and caught him by the neck. He squeezed. The butler's face turned blackish. He squirmed and fought desperately, but he was no match for Ballard.

AS soundlessly as he had fought, he went limp. Ballard kept his fingers constricted in an iron grip around his throat for a moment longer, then lowered him to the floor.

Narrow velvet drapes hung at each side of the anteroom doorway of the penthouse. With the drapes Ballard gagged and bound the man. He stepped softly toward the inner door of the anteroom.

Between more drapes held close to hide him, he peered into the living room of the place. Lavish, big, two stories high, it represented the last word in luxury. But Ballard had no eye for details.

His gaze leaped at once to two people standing tensely before an Italian fireplace in which a carefully manicured log burned decorously.

A man and a girl.

The man was of medium height but powerfully built, very dark, with coarse black hair growing low on a slanting forehead. He was in dinner clothes, and looked like a black panther tricked out in civilization's finery. Dangerous, deadly but sleek.

The girl looked as much a deadly, sleek thing out of a jungle as the man. She was dark, too, with black hair cut short and straight, big black eyes that looked as cold as jet, and a white, white skin. She was dressed in a flame-red negligee that was so carelessly clasped at the waist that much of her white beauty was revealed.

The two were glaring at each other like two fighting cats.

"Listen," said the man hoarsely, "we took this job on in the first place because we could get an income for life out of it. We knew that after it

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was done, and Miles had fried, we could bleed Rand forever."

Ballard almost gave himself away as his breath hissed out at the name. Rand. Thompson Rand, of course. One of the two other beneficiaries of the Standish will, who stood to gain millions by Standish's death and the further conviction and execution of Arthur Miles.

The dark-haired man in the sleek tuxedo went on:

"We get things all lined up, we stop the private dicks from Chicago from butting in till it's too late, and now you throw a wrench in the spokes. You talk about taking a lump sum from Rand and calling it quits."

"Yes, I do," said the girl. "And I say it again, Tony. A hundred grand apiece, and lay off Rand."

Tony! Ballard's jaw tightened. Tony!

The man who had killed Jim Doyle and callously carved him up to delay identification had been named Tony. And now, in the apartment of a girl who was somehow linked with the rest of the gang who were in on Miles' framing.

Ballard's great fists quivered. This must, beyond all shadow of doubt, be his partner's murderer.

Meanwhile, Tony snarled on: "Why? Why do we lay off Rand for a hundred thousand when we can get five times that much, ten times that much, for the Miles' frame and the bump-off of Standish?"

"Lots of reasons," said the girl.

"Name one! Listen, Kit, if you're trying to cross me, I'll—"

TONY'S voice died at the look in the girl's eyes. From where he hid, Ballard could see her eyes too. They were venomous, hard as glass, defiant and unafraid. "You'll what?" Katherine Jordan asked in a low, icy tone.

Tony only glared at her.

"Listen, big shot," said Kit, slowly, dangerously, "it's time to tell you off. Time to get you your hundred grand, and show you out the door. Cross you? Maybe you'd call it that. Give a reason why we should lay off Rand? Sure, I can do that, too. And I will if you ask for it."

Tony's voice was a flat, terrible thing in its sudden composure. "All right, I'm asking."

"Okay, here's the answer. I'm going to marry Rand. That's why you'll lay off him from now on."

Tony's breathing sounded strangled.

"You're nuts—lying!"

Kit laughed. It was like the tinkle of breaking glass.

"Lying? Say, it isn't hard for a guy, even a blue-blooded rat like Thompson Rand, to fall for me." She thrust out a slim leg, uncovered by the move to a few inches above her stocking-top, and regarded it. "Lots of men have liked me, Tony—including you."

Tony's breathing sounded more labored, more strangled. But he said nothing. Ballard found himself holding his breath with the ominous tensity of the scene he'd stumbled upon.

"Lots of water has gone under the bridge, Tony," Kit said, "since I met Rand, drunk in a night club, and said I'd be the go-between for him and a gang to knock off his rich uncle and pin the rap to his cousin, Miles. Lots of water! Rand's fallen for me like a dynamited house—and I'm marrying him. Two million he'll have, almost, counting in Miles' share. I'm marrying that two million, Tony, and you're laying off. See? And I've got enough on you to make you lay off. Understand?"

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Tony's eyes were unblinking, feral, bloodshot.

"I suppose you know," he said, very softly, "that you're committing suicide, Kit."

The girl laughed, white teeth showing between the ripe red of her lips.

"Don't pull that on *me*, Tony. You wouldn't like the results."

"No?" breathed Tony, coming a step closer.

"No," said Kit, paling a little but unflinching. "Listen. In a certain lawyer's safe there's an interesting document. In that document is the story of how Tony Molin, and some pals, were introduced to Thompson Rand by me. There's an account of how Tony Molin went to Eric Standish's house, got in the bedroom window, and drilled Standish.

"There's an account of how Tony got into Arthur Miles' apartment while Miles was at the theater, lifted Miles' finger prints from his bathroom glass and a varnished cigarette casket, and planted those prints on Standish's doorknob and the gun that killed Standish.

"There's a detail of how Tony Molin slashed his thumb and dripped blood on the sleeve of a coat in Miles' closet. It's all there, in black and white, darling.

"It's witnessed by two law clerks who saw me sign the last page while a blank paper was held over the writing. And it's in a sealed envelope marked: To be opened in the event of the death of Katherine C. Jordan."

TONY came still nearer, eyes murderous, nostrils compressed. "In your lawyer's safe, eh? And you think you can scare me off with that, eh? Why, you two-timing little—" He caught her bare white arm with a snakelike dart of his right hand.

"Don't you know old Felish is the easiest mouthpiece in town to buy for a couple of grand? I'll get that paper—"

"I didn't say my own lawyer had it. Anyway, you can't buy him—I've offered to double any price you—"

She bit her lip till a red drop appeared. "Stop twisting my arm, Tony."

"I'll twist it off," snarled Tony. "You little hell-cat. Trying to double-cross Tony Molin! And trying to two-time me in the bargain! You won't marry Rand or anybody else. You're my jane, see, till I feel like throwing you away."

"Let go of my arm you—" Profanity in a steady stream flowed from the ripe smooth lips.

In answer Tony's mouth writhed. With his free left hand he slapped her. An angry red welt appeared in the whiteness of her cheek.

"Stop it! I'll turn you in! I'll squeal till this town cracks from one end to the other! I'll—"

"You'll do nothing," purred Tony. "I'll see to that."

He hit her again, slashing her cheek open with the ring-set that glowed on his left little finger.

Ballard stepped out. He got almost to the two before they noticed him. Then both whirled, white faced, deadly as trapped animals, their own fight forgotten for the moment.

"Maybe it's a swell idea to sock her," said Ballard, jerking his bloody head toward Kit Jordan, "but I don't like to see women socked."

Tony had recovered his sinister composure. He drew a deep breath. His right hand crept toward his shoulder.

"Don't you?" he said. "Anything else you don't like?"

"I don't like your face," replied Ballard. "I think I'll change it a little,

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like you changed Jim Doyle's, before I hand you over to the cops and clear Arthur Miles."

"Mind telling us who the hell you happen to be?" said Tony. An odd look had come into his eyes.

His hand had stopped crawling toward his gun.

"Not at all," said Ballard. "I'm the partner of the man you'll fry for killing—"

He whirled like a streak of light as a soft sound from behind him suddenly explained the odd look in Tony's eyes. But he was not quick enough to dodge the blow, only to receive it sideways instead of squarely.

He saw a face with a mustache that looked ragged because of a scar on the upper lip, as he sagged to the floor. He heard Tony say: "Good work, Pete, ol' boy!"

Then the gun rapped him again, and for the second time that night he went out.

CHAPTER VI

Confession

HE came to slowly, this time. For minutes he could not comprehend what had happened to him, where he was.

His eyes rested blankly on the elaborate furnishings of a room that was two stories high. He heard a slow drip from something behind him, near the fireplace. Drip, drip, drip. Like a leaky faucet.

He blinked. A face with a low forehead under coarse black hair, swam before his eyelids, and the face of a girl like a dangerous tiger-flower. Girl named Kit something . . . man named Tony. . . .

He cursed as memory returned, and looked at his watch. It was ten minutes after one. In less than four hours Arthur Miles would walk to the big chair.

He got dazedly to his feet, swayed a moment while he preserved his balance by hanging to the edge of a heavy mahogany table. Then he turned to see what made the monotonous, steady dripping noise.

Slowly what little color was left in his face, faded.

His eyes narrowed to needle-like slits as they rested on the source of the small sound.

On the davenport near the fireplace lay a sleek, silk-clad figure, a body alluring even in death, half-covered by a flame-red negligee.

Kit Jordan. In the whiteness of her throat was a dagger. From the ragged well in which the steel was buried, came a slow trickle, slowing even as he gazed, as the no longer beating heart sent no more of the red flood to well up beside the dagger.

Gazing at the dead girl, Ballard fought to make his aching brain sort out the pieces. There were pieces to be sorted out—pieces that needed desperately to be sorted. But all Ballard could do was stare at the girl who had had the temerity to threaten one of the deadliest killers he had ever encountered.

Some sort of order came back to his brain. Why hadn't Tony killed him, too? Why had Tony, and the man, Pete, left him unconscious here to testify against them?

The answer came with a click, and he cursed.

Just another frame by a gang expert at framing people.

He was supposed to be found here, unconscious, beside the murdered girl. The cops, no doubt already phoned by Tony or Pete to come to the penthouse at once, were supposed to nail him ir-

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revocably for the killing—for two killings, now, if he couldn't explain the Doyle murder!

Only one thing had upset the calculations. His skull had been just a little harder than Pete had thought. Either that, or else a little more time had been taken by the cops in getting here than the killers had figured.

Ballard rocked on his heels as a sound came to him from the street far below. A sound he had never thought would come to jar him as it had jarred him tonight. The siren of a squad car.

He raced for the door. No doubt his finger prints were all over the murder room. On the knife handle, on the furniture, on the doorknobs, everywhere. But he could not stop to do anything about that. His chance—his sole chance now—of ducking the murder charges, was to accomplish what he had set out to do:

Clear Arthur Miles, and nail the gang that had framed Miles and later himself!

The elevator indicators told him that the left of the two elevators was on the eighth floor. He pressed the button. The elevator came up.

"Basement!" he snapped to the uniformed elevator man when the door opened.

The elevator attendant looked at Ballard's left hand, which was jammed in his coat pocket as though it held a gun, looked at the big man's bloody head and set, heavy jaw. He turned the color of ashes, and sent the car down to the basement.

Ballard got out and ran for the alley door of the building, hearing as he did the scuffle of heavy-soled shoes and the loud sound of voices as the police hurried into the lobby.

"If either the cops would quite chasing me," he complained, "or the crooks would quit chasing me, I might do something. As it is, I haven't a Chinaman's chance—"

But he knew better than that. He had a good chance, now—the brightest offered to him in his whole evening of effort. And he knew he'd better win on that chance. His own fate, as well as Arthur Miles's now rested on winning.

IN a narrow, four-story, red stone front house on Washington Square, a middle aged man who looked not unlike a vulture with his fringed bald head and his scrawny throat with loose skin pouched under it, double-locked his front door and started down the first floor hall to do the same to the rear door.

He passed a double doorway, with sliding doors half-closed. The room behind it, his library, was in darkness. He walked a few steps beyond the half-closed door, then stopped abruptly. The big vein at his scrawny throat began to pulse wildly.

Something hard was pressed against his back, though he had heard no sound preceding the pressure. Some one had come out of the dark library and was holding a gun on him.

"You're Felish?" a voice sounded behind him.

The man gulped and nodded, looking straight ahead.

"Damn lucky for me your name is unusual," the voice calmly grunted. "If Kit Jordan's lawyer had been named Smith, I'd have had a hell of a time. But there was only one Felish in the classified book under lawyers. Step into the library, Felish."

The lawyer turned then. What he saw did not reassure him.

Covering him was his own gun, a .38 he kept in the drawer of his library

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table. The man who held it was big, bloodied, and had eyes like blue ice.

Felish walked into the library. Reaching behind him with his left hand, the marauder snapped on the lights and closed the sliding doors. There was a big, archaic key in the lock of the doors.

He turned it and then walked up to where Felish stood, white-lipped and trembling.

"The name's Ballard, Felish. And you needn't look like that. I'm not going to kill you—unless it's strictly necessary."

Perhaps the sentence was meant to reassure; but if so, it missed its intention. Felish began to tremble till the loose wattles of flesh at his throat quivered.

"Where's your safe, Felish. I suppose it's here in the library, but I haven't time to search for it."

Felish said nothing. Ballard's jaw crept forward.

"Damn you—a man's life depends on what I do here tonight. Arthur Miles' life to be exact. *Where's your safe?*"

"Behind that d-desk," chattered the lawyer, pointing to a huge, old-fashioned roll-top desk that took up five feet of wall.

"Now you're getting sensible," said Ballard. "Go over to it, and remember I'm right behind you."

"I know nothing about Arthur Miles. . . ." quavered Felish as he walked toward the big desk.

"All right," snapped Ballard. "I'll give you a break. I'll believe you. Because it doesn't make any difference anyway. Roll the desk away from the wall."

A little, a very little, flare-up occurred somewhere deep in Felish's vulture-like frame.

"Three servants on . . . the top . . . floor . . ." he gasped. "I'll shout . . ."

"IF you shout," said Ballard slowly, "it'll be the last time that big Adam's apple of yours bobs up and down. That's a promise, Felish. This is life-and-death business I'm on. I'm not a crook, by the way, and you can take that or leave it. Roll the desk back."

Felish swallowed, and rolled the desk back. It rolled easily, and revealed a large, old-fashioned safe in the wall behind it.

"Open the safe," said Ballard evenly.

"I . . . I . . . there's no money in that safe."

"I don't want money. Open that safe."

The floor of the library was carpeted. Under the carpeting before the door of the safe was an almost imperceptible small lump. Surreptitiously Felish's foot crept toward this lump. His foot pressed down, long and hard.

"Open the safe, Felish."

"What do you want from it? I've told you there was no cash there—"

"I want a paper that's in there. A document in a sealed envelope marked: Open in the event of Katharine Jordan's death."

"That isn't worth anything to anybody. Miss Jordan assured me of that when she gave it to me. Probably only a document preventing certain parties from molesting her. I understand she has led a rather—er—lively life—"

"You'd be surprised," said Ballard, "what it's worth to me and to Arthur Miles."

"I can't do this. The confidence of a client is sacred—"

"Felish," said Ballard softly, "are you going to open that safe?"

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Felish moistened his dry lips. His trembling fingers began to manipulate the vault dial.

And now, as he worked, he stood squarely on the unobtrusive small lump under the carpet.

"If I only knew what was in the paper—why you want it—" he babbled. "Perhaps you have a legitimate reason for this . . . this outrage. Not that I should give you the paper, anyway . . ."

"You're stalling," said Ballard, in a tone that set the lawyer's fingers to working much more speedily. "Shall I tell you what's in the envelope? A complete confession, exonerating Arthur Miles from the murder of his uncle, Eric Standish, and implicating one Tony Molin, one Katherine Jordan, one Thompson Rand, and probably several others. Hurry with it, Felish."

"I can't believe you," said Felish, his voice a high falsetto with fear and hope. "I simply can't. Surely Miss Jordan wouldn't allow an innocent man to be electrocuted—"

"She'd help strap him in the chair," said Ballard evenly. "That is, she would have. Now, she won't help anybody do anything any more. She's been killed."

"K-killed?" stammered Felish, his mouth slack with terror.

"Killed," nodded Ballard. "By Tony Molin," he added, in the tone of a teacher driving home a lesson. "Not me. Felish—give me that envelope and stop pawing around!"

"I—don't believe you—"

"Believe me or not," Ballard shrugged, "she's dead. Which means that you could open that envelope now, anyway. Only you'll have to take my word for it."

He cursed, and grabbed the envelope from the man's delaying hand. He ripped it open.

"Now listen to this," he said, "and then phone the governor of the State and get him to rush a stay of execution to Miles's death cell at once.

"'I, Katherine C. Jordan, do hereby confess that on October 17th of this year I introduced Thompson Rand to Tony Molin, and three others, known gangsters whose names will be added. I further confess that at that meeting it was planned to kill Mr. Eric Standish, uncle of Thompson Rand, and charge Arthur Miles, cousin of Thompson Rand, with the murder. . . .' Well, well, get going, Felish. Pick up the phone and call Albany.

"The governor hasn't any too much time to work in."

"This is impossible," bleated Felish, touching the lump under the carpet once more before walking toward the table on which a cradle telephone rested. "Utterly impossible!"

"We'll see what the governor thinks," said Ballard grimly.

"Want to hear some more? 'I further confess that on October 19th, Tony Molin entered the apartment of Arthur Miles, removed Miles' finger prints with a special pad from his bathroom glass and a cigarette casket, daubed blood on the sleeve of one of Miles' coats, and then went to the home of Eric Standish—'"

A crash from the window interrupted him. Both he and the lawyer whirled. At what he saw, Ballard's gun started to jerk. Then, as sure death was promised at a further move, he let it sag in his hand till it pointed toward the floor.

"Drop it, Ballard," a voice cracked out.

Ballard dropped the gun, face expressionless as he stared at the new

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factors entering the game from this unexpected angle.

CHAPTER VII

Trapped

THE library window opened onto a narrow strip of sod between Felish's house and the next. It was only eight feet or so above the sod strip.

Standing on some support out of Ballard's range of vision, and stepping through the broken window, came Tony Molin. An automatic in his right hand trained steadily on Ballard's big chest.

After Tony came Pete, a snarl twitching his ragged mustache. He, too, held a gun. Then followed Whitey Cavanaugh, pale and frightened, deadly as a scared rat; and a fourth man who was big but flabby looking, with a face at once aristocratic and dissipated.

"Looks interesting, huh, Rand?" Tony said, jerking his head toward the paper Ballard still clenched in his left hand.

"See why I dragged you away from that night club—why I wanted us to get here so quick?"

Thompson Rand, hitherto unseen principal in this affair, glanced away from Ballard's eyes. Tony snarled at the Chicago detective:

"You again! Slippery as an eel, eh? But you've slipped for the last time, Ballard. I forgot about your overhearing Kit's talk of Felish and a signed confession when I left you at her joint to take the rap for her death. If I'd remembered, I might not have left you so quick—or I might have left you with a slug from Kit's gun in your brains. Though how you beat the cops away from there . . ."

He stopped talking. His gun slanted toward Ballard with an intention that could not be missed.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" squealed Felish, with his face going green from a terror even more profound than would have been natural under the circumstances. "I beg of you! Not here! Not in my house! Please!"

Tony grinned with deadly menace. "When you pick rough playmates to train with, Felish, you can't get surprised if they play rough. Far as that goes, you know what's in Kit's envelope, now, too, you slimy buzzard. I'll have to take care of that."

Felish's teeth chattered so that you could hear them across the room. Tony, obviously the type of killer that actively enjoys his work, sniggered.

Thompson Rand was as white as a sheet, but there was no mercy mingled with the horror in his eyes. If he was staggered by the desperate situation his original tie-up with this gang had got him into, it was still obvious that he intended to do nothing whatever to try to prevent it.

"But you can't do anything . . . like this . . . here!" bleated Felish. "My God— There are reasons—"

"I don't know any reasons better than my reasons for getting that paper of Kit Jordan's!" said Tony.

Ballard's hand tightened on the paper.

HERE was exoneration for an innocent man who was sentenced to die in a little more than three hours. Here was the electric chair for Tony and his crew—and exoneration for himself.

Tony's gun tensed a little. The man's black eyes flamed dully. He settled down a bit on his feet.

"Take Felish, Pete," he said.

"The police . . ." squeaked Felish.

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The two words were his last. Tony was through talking.

The two shots flamed almost as one, with a red streak belching toward the cowering lawyer and another lancing toward Ballard.

Felish screamed and fell. Ballard fell, too. But Ballard's fall was a tenth of a second ahead of Tony's shot. And Ballard did not writhe on the carpet as Felish did.

Ballard's left hand shot out to the roll-top desk, and the paper in his fingers slithered under the desk, in the narrow slot between the floor and the bottom drawer.

As Tony cursed and fired again, Ballard leaped.

The shock of a slug in his right shoulder whirled Ballard half around in mid-air, but he reached his goal. His left arm swept Tony's feet from under him, tripped him against Whitey, who fell with him as his automatic exploded to crash half the antique crystal chandelier down from the ceiling.

Ballard grunted as a bullet from Pete's gun found the calf of his leg. Then his left hand caught up Felish's .38 from the carpet and an instant later, as Pete's gun roared twice, his shattered right shoulder hit the big library table and knocked it against the raving gunman.

He sagged behind the barricade of the table top, but in a second the black curtain descending on his senses lifted with the instinct to preserve his life, as a slug splintered through the two inches of hard wood within an inch of his head. The table was no shield; its only aid was to hide from the sight of the three with the blazing guns.

Ballard darted his head out from the opposite end of the tipped table from where slugs were ripping through the wood and seeking him out. He shot once, carefully, and ducked back to the other end, trailing a bloody left leg behind him.

Whitey went down, shrieking, clawing at his smashed thigh. Pete raved steady curses and emptied his clip through the table. Ballard smiled a little with lips that were white weals in his face.

One of the bullets had cut clean through his side.

He raised up from behind the table top and cracked down at Tony. He missed, and sprawled to the floor barely in time to avoid being killed twice over by the answering fusillade from Tony's gun.

He didn't see Thompson Rand anywhere, but the fact made little imprint on his fogging brain. The only realities were Tony and Pete, firing steadily and systematically through the table-top, Whitey, shrieking curses and crawling for the gun he had dropped when his thigh-bone was smashed, and the stark figure of Felish on the floor so near that now and then it jerked as a slug tore into it.

He raised above the table-top at another point, blazed at Pete, and chewed his lips as he missed again. This left-handed shooting, with his right arm and hand hanging limp and useless beside him, was not so good.

THE room resounded with the blazing guns. Ballard was past hearing, though, almost past thinking.

It was mechanically, instinctively, that he turned a little when a movement at the far end of the room caught the corners of his eyes.

The instinctive move preserved his life a few seconds more.

Thompson Rand was down there, quaking with terror, but still a factor

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in the fight. He had a heavy bronze book-end poised, and threw just as Ballard looked.

The sharp metal weight flashed toward Ballard's head. Ballard ducked. The angled corner caught him slantingly in the throat. He raised his gun to answer . . .

Tony and Pete leaped to right and left. They reached the two ends of the table simultaneously and glared down at Ballard with guns snapping up to level squarely at him. He had no protection now.

Impossible odds. One man can't down four in a shut-in gun duel. And now the odds had caught up to the guy from Chi.

Ballard's trigger clicked futilely as he aimed at Rand. His clip was empty. He rolled aside with a convulsive movement as Tony and Pete shot together, felt splinters from the floor rip into his cheek.

Thus his glazing eyes saw Tony's hand seem to disintegrate while his gun flew half across the room.

Pete, eyes maniacal with baffled fury, whirled toward the window.

His lips went slack, and he slowly raised his hands.

"That's right," snapped a voice. "Put 'em up and keep 'em that way, like nice boys. Well, look at this! Mr. Thompson Rand, prominent man about town—"

The speaker, a tall, thin detective who was entering the window with two cops and a Ryerman special watchman behind him, stopped abruptly. His eyes bulged as he stared at Ballard lying behind the overturned table.

"*You!*" he choked. "Good— You! Again!"

Ballard coughed. Bloody froth stained his lips.

"Seems to me," he mumbled, "you take a hell of a while to answer an alarm signal. I saw old Felish step on the buzzer under the carpet ten minutes ago. Been waiting . . . impatiently . . . ever since. . . ."

In the death cell, Miles sat on the iron bunk and stared vacantly at the glaring overhead light. In a little while that light, and the rest of the lights in the place, would dim, and dim again, as the current was diverted from the lighting system to course through his writhing body. He would buckle against the straps in the electric chair. And after a moment a doctor would press a stethoscope to his bare chest and pronounce him—

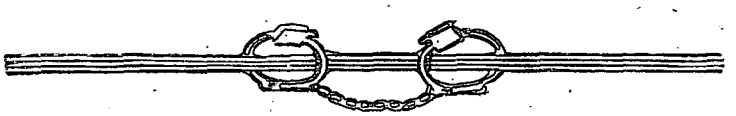
Miles shuddered. It was hard to die, innocent of the death-crime you were charged with. But no power under heaven could save him now, he realized. He buried his face in his hands.

". . . under the desk," whispered Ballard to the tall, thin detective. "Paper clearing . . . Miles . . . Read it and phone Albany . . . governor . . ."

He collapsed.

The New York detective spun toward one of the cops.

"Get the ambulance. Plug him up. Help him." He shoved against the uniformed shoulder. "Do something! We can't let this guy die—he's either the coldest-blooded crook in seventeen states, or some lousy kind of a hero!"



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Detective Bradfield Had to Plan the Perfect Murder—to Keep Out of the Morgue

Bradfield knew that he was covered from behind

Red Bait for Murder

By K. Krausse

IT was a little past three. I was considering putting on my hat and taking in a movie. Business was that slow. Then the phone rang. I picked up the receiver, said, "Hello."

A man's voice I didn't know asked, "Is this Dallas Bradfield?"

I said, "Yeah," and waited.

The voice had nothing to distinguish it from a thousand other voices, except it was a little on the sharp side. It went on:

"Okay. Listen. Someone's on his way up to your office. He's bringing you a job. No matter what it is—you're to take it. Understand?"

The hell I did. Sure, I thought, I detected a veiled threat in the way that "understand?" was intoned. But I also thought I was imagining things.

"Brother," I muttered, pleasantly enough, "maybe you've got the right number; but you haven't got *my* number. I'm particular what kind of cases I tackle. When I hear what this job is—maybe I'll take it. Maybe I won't. So what?"

The wire crackled. The voice be-

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came very, very soft. "I see you don't understand, Bradfield. I'll spell it out for you. Turn that job down—and you leave your office in a basket."

For a split second I was so surprised I just blinked. Then I laughed out loud.

"So it's funny." My caller didn't ask me. He told me.

"It's a scream," I chuckled. "And why? Because in all the thrillers I've ever read the private dick gets a tip to lay off a case—or else. Your reversing the usual procedure makes you either a nut or a comedian. My money says it's the last. Where're you playing, fella?"

I laughed some more, broke off abruptly and demanded: "Who the devil are you anyway?"

"Never mind that," my friend answered flatly. "Just get this straight. I'm not kidding, Bradfield. This isn't a gag. Turn down your next case and your next address will be the morgue."

This thing had stopped being funny. I was getting madder by the second. But I didn't get a chance to blow off the lid. At that moment my office door opened, and the bozo on my wire said:

"Here's your customer now. Remember, shamus. Take his case. Or it'll be too bad—for you."

The line went dead. As my mitt flashed to my armpit holster, my brain churned. Obviously my mysterious phone caller was stationed where he could watch me. Most likely at a window in the building across the street. Else how could he know someone had walked into my office? But what was the gag? Who was he? What was his "case" I had to accept or have dirt slapped in my face?

I gave up. I palmed my gat ready for action in my lap and stared at the man who had just entered.

He was about thirty-two, faultlessly tailored in a suit that shrieked Bond Street, London. I don't like dudes. He was darkly handsome. I don't like pretty men. He had cold, calculating eyes that were set too close. I don't like those kind of eyes. And from under a just-too-darling mustache, he flashed me a toothy smile that was faintly patronizing.

He approached my desk, said: "Good afternoon, Mr. Bradfield. Permit me to introduce myself. My name's Stanley Darnell."

My brows went up, then down.

HIS face had drawn a blank with me. But his name registered plenty. I'd read it off and on in the society columns. I knew he was the nephew of old Zachary Cavitt, a millionaire, who lived in one of the few remaining mansions on Fifth Avenue, and who had been a Wall Street buccaneer in the days before market rigging lost public favor.

"Have a seat, Mr. Darnell," I invited none too cordially. Rumor had it that, for all his good-looks and moneyed background, Stanley Darnell was rotten clear through. That, and the suspicion he was responsible for the mysterious phone call that had preceded his arrival, made me leery of him.

He sat down. I waited. Before speaking he took time to pull out a platinum cigarette case. He offered it to me. I shook my head. He helped himself to a fag, fired it. Then he replaced the case, took out a wallet. From it he extracted several banknotes. He leaned forward, placed them on my desk.

"I want to hire your services," he told me. "There's your fee. In advance. Five thousand dollars."

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I frowned at the five brand new thousand dollar bills. "They're very pretty," I told Darnell. "What do I do to earn them?"

He puffed at his cigarette, eyed me in cool appraisal a moment, silently, then, "You've been in the papers a lot lately, Bradfield. You're called 'The Dick with the Criminal Mind.'"

I didn't dodge the bouquet. I'm no shrinking violet.

Darnell went on: "Your press releases after you've finished a case have always interested me. I mean the parts where you state if the criminal had done thus and so he might have evaded apprehension."

I shrugged impatiently. "The newshawks eat up that stuff. And it's good publicity for me. So what?"

Darnell seemed in no hurry. He drawled: "I need a man with your imagination because I have none myself. I want you to figure out a way I can commit a crime and not be caught."

Well, there it was. The reason for the fantastic build-up this job had received. I'd been elected to become an accessory to some crooked deal, and Darnell had wanted to be sure my answer wouldn't be "no."

"What you want, Darnell," I pumped out, mouth tight, "and what you'll get—are two different things. If you don't drag yourself out of here in two seconds flat I'll heave you out!" I threw his money in his lap. "And take that with you. It smells."

Darnell rose slowly. The money fluttered to the floor. But he didn't move from in front of his chair. His lips were curled. His eyes had dwindled in size until they were icy pin points. I read the signs and felt my muscles tense.

I was staring into the livid face of a killer!

And in that split second it dawned on me what Darnell had come to me for.

He rapped out: "Bradfield — I wasn't joking when I told you I lack the imagination to conceive a perfect crime. But I've made up my mind to commit one. If you're interested, I'm going to kill my uncle Zachary Cavitt. And you're going to help me. I wasn't sure I could buy you. That's why I had a friend call you before I came here. What he threatened goes. Turn me down and you die. You've got exactly one minute to reconsider."

I CAME to my feet, bringing my gun into sight. "So it's murder you're thinking of, is it? Why you damn fool! Do you think you can bulldoze me into having any part of murder? You or the punk you had phone me? I won't call the cops. If I told them this story they'd laugh at me. Get the hell out of here—quick! Or so help me—I'll play a rhapsody on your pretty puss with the barrel of this gun!"

Whatever he was, Darnell wasn't a coward. He didn't so much as glance at my gun.

"You're acting the fool!" he snapped. "Look behind you!"

I laughed harshly. "Nuts to you! Try a new one!"

"Suit yourself," Darnell clipped. "But let me tell you—the man who phoned you is in an office across the street at a window level with yours. He's got you covered with a high-speed, silenced rifle. At a signal from me he'll squeeze the trigger. And be forewarned—Pete Globat holds medals for sharpshooting. He won't miss! Now—will you change your mind?"

I kept Darnell covered, flicked a hasty look over my shoulder.

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He had spoken the truth. Across the street in a partly open window facing mine I marked the glint of a rifle muzzle. It was aimed at my back.

I turned my eyes back to Darnell. He was smiling now. Coldly. Evilly. The cigarette dangling in his mouth sent lazy smoke spirals ceilingward.

"Too bad—for you—I needed your cunning, Bradfield," he said. "Your 'criminal mind.' But Uncle Zack's murder couldn't be an ordinary affair. I was smart enough to know I couldn't plan it. Hence this. Well, what's the answer? Your time's almost up."

My thoughts raced. I didn't kid myself that Darnell was pulling a bluff. I knew. I saw it in his grimly determined eyes. If I turned him down I'd get a slug in the back. Sure. I could have plugged him—cold. But what was the percentage? That blast was still waiting behind me. I'd have the satisfaction of taking him with me. But what good would I be to myself dead?

Darnell might have read my mind. He added: "Of course, I realize you can kill me. But I gambled you wouldn't be that big a sap. You'll be a long time dead, too."

I shrugged resignedly, sat down. "I know when I'm licked," I muttered. "Give me the low-down. I'll see what I can do."

Darnell grinned his approval. "Wise. But before we talk turkey, suppose you let me have your gun."

I hesitated, tossed it on my desk.

As Darnell leaned forward to pick it up, I put my hands under the edge of the desk, and heaved. At the same time I jackknifed my legs and flung myself sideways out of my swivel chair.

Several sounds filled the office. Darnell's gasped curse as he leaped clear of the desk. The clatter of the desk's contents tumbling to the floor. The tinkle of shattered glass. And the *ziss-s-s* of a bullet as it hissed past my ear.

Then a thousand lights burst inside my skull and everything went black.

My action had been timed to the second. Sure. But I hadn't counted on my head hitting the radiator located on the side of the desk where I'd thrown myself.

II

I WOKE up slowly. My head seemed inflated like a balloon. It ached like the devil. A red haze blinded me. I tried to lift a hand to brush the fog out of my eyes. I found I couldn't move. A familiar voice said: "Wipe the blood out of his eyes, Pete. He's coming around."

Rough hands jerked my chin up. A handkerchief mopped my face.

My brain was beginning to function after a fashion. I realized my contact with the radiator had opened my scalp. I also realized I was siting in a chair, my hands bound behind me. How long I had been out I didn't know. Long enough apparently for Darnell's sharpshooter pal to join him.

My vision cleared, focused, to strange surroundings. I wasn't in my office, but in a luxuriously furnished living room. Before me stood Darnell and a man who I guessed was the Pete Globat he had mentioned. Globat was a lean, angular individual with sharp, obsidian eyes, and a little round mouth that looked like a hole punched in his thin face.

I blinked at Darnell. "Your dump? How'd you get me here?"

He nodded, chuckled. "Pete drove my car into the alley behind your office building while I kept you covered.

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Then we carried you down the stairs and out through the basement. Fortunately we encountered no one. This is my penthouse apartment. We had no trouble bringing you up. You were a friend that had had an accident." His eyes twinkled frostily. "Which wasn't much of an exaggeration. The bump you gave yourself knocked you out for an hour."

His expression hardened. "And I hope that crack also knocked some sense into your head. We mean business. I've told you I want to kill Zachary Cavitt. I'm going to give you the particulars. You are going to give me a fool-proof plan. I'm confident you can. Stall—and you die!"

I said nothing, and waited. What else could I do?

Globat dropped into a chair, fired a cigarette.

Darnell's dark, deep-set eyes were smoky now, pitiless, as though smoldering with some flame of insanity.

"You've heard of my uncle, Zachary Cavitt?" he demanded.

I nodded.

"Did you know he's crazy?"

My lips twitched. "No. But the information doesn't surprise me. Insanity must run in the family, judging by this stunt you're pulling."

Darnell let that ride, although his eyes blazed angrily. "Maybe I am crazy," he growled, "if it's crazy to want four or five million dollars. *And* revenge. But Uncle Zack's insanity takes a different form. Up to two days ago he let me have all the money I wanted. Never questioned or interfered with my mode of living. I took it for granted I would be his heir.

"Then suddenly he called me in to him, gave me a miserly fifty thousand dollars and threw me out. Do you know why?"

I said, softly: "It took him thirty-odd years to discover what a skunk he was supporting. But better late than never."

Darnell took a step toward me with fist upraised. "You—" he snarled.

Globat muttered: "Save it, Stan."

DARNELL dropped his fist, face working, went on: "He had learned I was planning to marry Dolce Fowler, and ordered me to give her up, or be cut out of his will. He told me he didn't give a damn what else I did, but he wasn't going to let me ruin the life of as fine a girl as Dolce!" His dark face flushed with fury and righteous indignation.

I thought of his unsavory reputation where women were concerned, said dryly: "Good for Uncle Zack! Who is Dolce Fowler?"

Darnell glared. "The only daughter of Gordon Fowler, the lawyer. He's Uncle Zack's legal adviser and lifetime friend. Of course, I told my uncle where he could go. That I would marry Dolce even if he did disinherit me."

"How gallant!" I cracked sarcastically. "If I remember correctly, Gordon Fowler has more millions himself than I have toes. And Dolce, being an only daughter—"

I broke off when Darnell's fist plowed into my face.

"Shut up, you—" he rasped. "And listen."

I licked blood from my split lip, and listened thereafter.

Darnell continued: "Uncle Zack told me he'd fix it so I couldn't marry Dolce. I didn't take him seriously. I knew Dolce loved me. I called her, persuaded her to elope with me. But this morning I waited for her in vain. Instead of meeting me she sent me a

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note. She wrote me her father had forbidden our marriage. That she could never see me again. That she was sailing tonight on the *Majestic* for an indefinite stay in Europe."

Darnell's jaw muscles quivered with unbridled passion. "I recognized my uncle's handiwork. Justly furious, I went to him. I threatened to kill him for meddling in my affairs. He laughed at me! He told me he had kept his promise. That he had changed his will because I had disobeyed him in regard to Dolce. He sneered at me—said I was too yellow, too mercenary to kill just for satisfaction. Then he laughed at me again, and had his butler show me the door."

Here Darnell's teeth bared. His eyes blazed with unadulterated hate. "When I reached my apartment around noon, a message from him awaited me. He wanted to see me. I thought he had repented, and hurried to him. I found him closeted with Gordon Fowler. He said to me, 'This morning you threatened to kill me. I told you you were too yellow, too mercenary to do it. I've been wondering which streak in you predominates. So I'm going to perform an interesting experiment. I've changed my will again. Read it, Gordon.'"

Darnell clenched and unclenched his fists. "The will was undoubtedly the product of a warped mind. In it Uncle Zachary left all his money to me, *provided I killed him!*"

Darnell laughed harshly. "And that isn't all. The will also provided I had to prove to Gordon Fowler that I had killed him! Do you understand what motivated that instrument, Bradfield? My uncle was afraid that I *might* kill him. He wanted to eliminate the possibility of my getting away with it. At the same time he was laughing at me, goading me on to try. To try what he believes impossible. He thinks I can't kill him, prove I did, and yet get away with it!

"Well, I'll show him!" Darnell's voice was husky, as though his emotion was choking him. "I'm going to kill him if it's the last thing I do! And I'm going to get away with it! *I'll* have the last laugh—spending his money while he's rotting in hell! And that's where you come in, Bradfield. *You* are going to help me!"

For a long moment I remained silent while I digested Darnell's amazing story. I didn't know who was crazier. Darnell or his uncle, Zachary Cavitt. Imagine anyone baiting his own murder with four or five million bucks! Imagine anyone *wanting* to commit murder under the proviso of that will!

I had never met Zachary Cavitt personally. But I could picture him—a malicious, vindictive old man who got some sort of sadistic pleasure in taunting a nephew whom he considered a worthless ingrate and yellow parasite.

I HAD little sympathy for Darnell, although his feelings were easily analyzed. Vain, egotistic, he was the type in whom ridicule would rouse a deep-rooted hatred. His uncle had not only laughed at him, jeered at him, Cavitt had also deprived Darnell of two fortunes—his own and Dolce Fowler's. Then, to cap a climax, Cavitt had flaunted his nephew's own threat in his face by making a fortune the reward for his—Cavitt's—murder. That was oil on fire.

By executing that screwy will, Cavitt had signed his own death warrant. His outraged megalomania, the driving force; his greed—he was mercenary by nature—an added stimulus, Darnell would never rest until he had

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carried out the provisions of that will.

And I was the sucker Darnell had decided should pull the chestnuts out of the fat for him. Or die. That he was fully determined to kill me if I refused to help him was plainly evident in his set, grim mouth, his burning eyes.

During his narrative I had experimented with the bonds about my wrists. Whoever had tied me had made a good job of it. I was helpless. Helpless, and confronted with the necessity of planning a man's death or dying myself. Is it a wonder I broke out in a cold sweat?

Darnell said: "I told you Uncle Zack's murder couldn't be an ordinary one, Bradfield. You have the facts. Now start thinking. How can I kill him; prove that I did to Gordon Fowler who will immediately turn me over to the police; and yet get away with it?"

Globat contributed, with a sardonic smile: "And—Mister 'Dick with the Criminal Mind'—don't plant a joker in your plan. I admit we tried and failed to conceive a practical plan ourselves.—But that isn't saying we're too dumb to tumble if you attempt a trap."

I looked at him. "Just where do you figure in this, Globat?"

He laughed shortly: "Stan Darnell came to me with his problem. He happened to know I once killed a man and beat the law. He hoped I could help him. I couldn't. The best I could do for him was suggest we 'enlist' your services."

A pause followed. Finally Darnell said: "Well, Bradford? Got any ideas?"

I looked him square in the eyes. "Just one. Even if I could figure out the frame you need, I wouldn't. Maybe Zachary Cavitt asked for what you want to give him. Okay, give it to him. But take your own chances with the law. I'm not making myself party to a murder!"

Darnell's jaw crept forward in a savage scowl. Very deliberately he pulled a gun from his pocket.

"So you intend to play the big, sacrificing hero for a man you don't even know—for a lunatic," he sneered. "Is that it?"

I watched the gun come up. For a wild moment I lost my head. I struggled with my bonds, desperately, futilely.

"Yeah," I husked. "That's it. Shoot and be damned!"

A humid wrath grew in Darnell's eyes. "It won't be that easy," he muttered thickly.

He swung his gun in a vicious arc. It smashed against my cheek. Another blow rocked my head, and ignited a maze of shooting comets in my skull. I clenched my teeth against the cry of agony that welled in my throat, spit curses instead.

"Tell me when you've had enough!" Darnell snarled. A dozen more slashing blows made hash of my face.

I heard myself say in a voice I didn't recognize as my own: "The hell with you!" Then I lost all feeling and slid into a coma.

A burning sensation in my mouth roused me. Globat was forcing whisky between my swollen lips.

"Don't be a sap, Bradfield," he said. "Why take this for Cavitt? He's nothing to you."

My answer was a croaked oath. "Hand it out, punks. I can take it!"

MY feet weren't tied. I lifted a foot in a murderous boot that caught Globat in the stomach. He sank to the floor, writhing,

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mingling moans with curses. His suffering touched off a spark of perverted humor in me. I started to laugh like a maniac.

That brought him erect, his eyes brimming with rage and hate. He snatched the gun out of Darnell's mitt, levelled it at me.

Darnell jumped him with a yell of anger. He knocked the gun aside just as it exploded. The slug went wide.

"What's the idea?" he demanded of Globat. "I'm not finished with him yet. I can make him play ball."

Globat glowered at me, mumbled: "Then do it quick. Or I'll tear him apart."

Darnell chuckled dryly. Watching me under lowered, malevolent brows he lit a cigarette. After a few drags he pressed the glowing tip against my face.

"How," he rumbled, "does that feel? Are you ready to come across?"

It wasn't so much the pain that set my stomach crawling as it was the stench of burning flesh. I clamped my teeth on my lips to choke down a groan. I didn't say anything. I didn't even curse any more. What was the use?

When Darnell saw I didn't cow, he put the cigarette to his lips, puffed it back to life. "Okay, man of iron," he jeered. "We'll see how you can stand it in the eyes. First the left. Then the right."

My heart almost stopped pumping. I couldn't believe my ears. It was incredible that a man could be that fiendish and do what Darnell threatened. But he didn't leave me long in doubt. He grabbed a fistful of my hair, held my head stiff, and poked the cigarette at my left eye. I was as close to soul-searing terror that moment as I've ever been in my life. I felt the butt's live coal sizzle on my eyelid. With a wild jerk I wrenched my face aside, gasped:

"Stop! Stop, damn you!"

Darnell snarled: "Do I get the murder frame?"

"Yes," I panted. "You win—"

Scared? Well, maybe. Funny. I would have taken a bullet in the guts without a whimper. But the prospect of having my eyes burned out first left me weak as a rag doll. It also drummed some sense into my head.

I reflected, why should I take the rap for Zachary Cavitt — a perfect stranger? Just because the old screwball had considered it a good joke to bait his own murder did that mean I had to be the martyred goat?

Darnell's eyes gleamed triumphantly. "Give him a drink, Pete," he told Globat. And to me he said: "Take your time now. But if you know what's good for you—"

III

HE left the sentence unfinished. But as it stood I knew what he meant. Globat poured some whisky down my gullet. I swallowed it. It cooled the fever in my brain. Minutes passed while I grappled mentally with the most fantastic problem of my career.

How could a man commit murder, prove that he had committed it to an antagonistic lawyer, and yet beat a tough murder rap?

Perhaps a quarter of an hour later, I said: "All right, punks. I've got a frame for you."

The two men exchanged quick glances. They put down their glasses. Darnell said thickly: "Let's have it."

"It will necessitate your committing another crime," I pointed out grimly. "But I don't suppose that'll cut any

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ice with you. Not if you have no scruples against murder."

Darnell's lips framed a sinister, icy smile. "I'd commit a dozen crimes to have the laugh on Zachary Cavitt—my precious uncle!" He stopped, shot me a probing look. "What is this other crime? Remember it can't be brought home to me."

"It won't be," I assured him. "Provided Globat is a stranger to Dolce Fowler."

Darnell stiffened perceptibly. "What has she to do with this?"

"You'll see. Globat—does the girl know you?"

Globat shook his head. "No."

"Good." I faced Darnell. "Listen. Can you talk Gordon Fowler into going with you to your uncle's home tonight at—say—eight-thirty?"

"Why—I think so." Darnell looked blank. "He was opposed to the crazy will Uncle Zack executed. If I tell him I want to try to effect a reconciliation, he'll come with me. But what—"

I cut him short. "All right. Do that. Then he can't see his daughter off. I happen to know her steamer sails at nine tonight. You, Globat, will go to the *Majestic's* dock shortly before nine. Tell Dolce Fowler her father was injured in an accident. She'll accept your offer to take her to the doctor's house where her father lies at death's door. She will be so upset it won't strike her as strange he wasn't moved to a hospital. You will then take her to some house you've rented for the occasion."

"Look here, Bradfield!" Darnell cried. "You're proposing Globat kidnap Dolce Fowler!"

"Sure," I agreed. "So what? Don't tell me your love for her won't permit it."

Darnell's eyes flashed dangerously. He opened his mouth, but Globat silenced him with a gesture.

"Shut up, Stan," he chopped off. "Don't put on an act about the girl. You know you were only after her dough. Let's hear the rest of this. Go on, Bradfield."

I continued: "When you have the girl under lock and key, Globat, you will inform her she's been snatched. You will call the Cavitt home and let her talk to her father a moment." I turned to Darnell. "That will be your cue. You will pull your gun and shoot your uncle dead!"

"Perhaps I'm exceptionally stupid," Darnell scowled. "I don't see how—"

"By heaven!" Globat broke in, eagerly. "I've got your drift already, Bradfield! Your scheme is so simple I could kick myself for not thinking of it before—"

"Before you punks messed me up?" I muttered ironically.

Globat laughed lightly. "Tough. Go on, spell it out for Stan."

"Be sure you have a spare rod with you," I told Darnell. "Shoot it into a wall through your coat. Then plant it in Cavitt's hand. And put the pressure on Fowler. Tell him—either he backs you up on a self-defense plea or his only daughter will be shipped him in small pieces. Fathers being what they are, he'll do it. He's an important man.

"The police will accept his explanation without question. Also order him to destroy that screwy will of your uncle's. If that were probated it might interest the D. A.'s office. You can inherit Cavitt's fortune under an old, more rational will. If one doesn't exist, you'll get the money anyhow as his only heir."

"Beautiful!" Globat breathed in reluctant admiration.

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But Darnell was ready with objections. He said:

"We'll have to keep Dolce prisoner a long time. Until the estate is settled. And then—when we've turned her loose—how do we know Fowler won't run straight to the police and tell them the real story?"

GLOBAT said: "The girl won't be missed while we keep her holed up. Her friends will think she's in Europe. As for the old man—once you have your mitts on the estate—we can bump him off."

Darnell studied me. "Is that what you had in mind?"

I shook my head. "No. I thought you might pull a fake rescue of the girl. If she was dumb enough to fall for you in the first place, I gather she only gave you up because her father talked her into it. With you in the rôle of 'brave hero,' she'll fall in your arms. You can sweep her off her feet, induce her to elope with you. It'll be a pipe. Once you've married her, you'll seal Fowler's lips. Whatever he might feel; whatever else he might do—he won't brand his son-in-law as a murderer."

"Perfect!" Globat exclaimed enthusiastically. "Stan, the 'Dick with the Criminal Mind' hasn't missed a bet! You not only get Cavitt's money, but the girl!"

Darnell's dark eyes smoldered, bored at me. He chewed his lip in silent thought. Finally he said: "If there's a joker in the plan, I can't see it either." He faced Globat. "All right. Let's get started. What'll we do with Bradfield? Kill him?"

I held my breath. Of course, I had expected to be killed. One way or the other I knew too much. But I had gambled on one thing. That my execution would be postponed. True, I had planned the murder frame to save myself from torture. Yet as I planned it, a desperate hope had kindled in the back of my brain. If the two conspirators let me live while they put my plot into operation, I might still be able to throw a monkey wrench into it.

I opened my mouth. But before I could voice a plea for my life, Globat said:

"He'll keep, Stan. Contingencies might arise. We might need his brains." He chuckled callously. "I think Bradfield will still trade us his help for a bullet in the heart rather than have his eyes burned out. For the time being we can tuck him in a closet."

I kept the relief out of my face. The blistering, bitter curses I heaped on the duo were for effect mostly. I didn't want to invite a conk on the skull, so I let them drag me into a bedroom and dump me into the pitch blackness of a clothes closet without protest.

The key turned in the lock. I heard their voices drift away. The bedroom door slammed. Then silence.

I lost no time getting to work on my bonds. My attempt to free myself in the living room had been unsuccessful. I had no better luck now. When my wrists were raw and bleeding from my struggle I gave up.

After a short rest, I pushed myself erect. Some suits that hung on a center rod enveloped me. I jerked clear of them, and shoved them to one side with my body.

I flung my shoulder against the door again and again. Until my bones ached. The rumpus I raised did not bring Globat and Darnell running. Obviously they had left the apartment.

Drenched with sweat, I propped myself against the back wall of the narrow

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closet and used my foot as a battering ram.

No use. The door was solid, sturdy. It withstood my savage attack. Bleak hopelessness descended upon me. It looked as if there wasn't much I could do about saving either Cavitt or myself.

Suddenly an inspiration electrified me. One by one I pulled the suits from their hangers with my teeth. Then sitting on my haunches I rifled the pockets. With my hands bound tight behind me, it was a job for a contortionist. But I managed it.

No miracle happened. I didn't find a pocket knife. I didn't expect to. I did find what I was looking for, however. A book of matches.

I BUTTED down the closet shelf overhead. Several hat boxes and other articles showered upon me. I contrived to tear the hat boxes to bits; and, using the tissue paper they contained as kindling, I soon had a miniature bonfire going.

Sure, I took a chance of suffocating or incinerating myself. But a doomed man doesn't stop to weigh risks.

Flames seared my flesh. Smoke, that quickly filled the small confines of the closet, stung my eyes. My tortured lungs fought for air.

Gritting my teeth against the triple agony, I held my wrists over the fire until the strands of the rope binding me gave way.

Then I quickly doused the fire by piling Darnell's clothes on it, fanned the smoke out of the closet through a small ventilator at the bottom of the door.

When the air was once more breathable, I lurched erect, wiped my grimed face.

My hands were free. Now what?

I searched my own pockets. My gun was gone, of course. But my captors hadn't seen fit to relieve me of a small case of collapsible tools I habitually carried. And I still had my fountain pen flash. I thumbed it on, fanned the door. My heart dropped. The door had no keyhole on the closet side.

An examination of my prison showed me walls of cedar. From my tool case I took the sections of a chisel, assembled it. With it I got some cleavage in a crack between the wide wooden panels. Enough so I could get my fingers behind it and yank it loose.

By dint of much hacking with the chisel, and a few determined kicks I peeled the plaster off the laths. The laths I ripped clear with my hands. The wall on the other side of the two by four beams also succumbed to my foot.

I squeezed through the hole I'd made, weak and trembling. With the knowledge that I was free, every nerve, every muscle in my body began to scream. I half collapsed to the floor, spent. I wanted to lie there for a long, long time.

But my strength returned with a rush. Maybe the thought that I had until nine o'clock at the latest to save Zachary Cavitt from the murder frame I had myself concocted helped me. I jumped to my feet, flicked my flash at my watch. My scalp tightened. My breath caught in my throat.

The hands read eight forty-five.

I had tunneled into another bedroom. A hasty survey disclosed a phone on the bedstand. Two strides took me to the instrument. I snatched it up, dialed operator, snapped:

"Police business! Give me Zachary Cavitt residence on Fifth Avenue—quick!"

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Luckily the operator believed me. She gulped: "Yes, sir!" Then, after a short pause that seemed a century, she husked: "Sorry, sir. The line's busy! Do you want me to cut you in?"

My mind never worked so fast. "Yes!" I croaked. "But first trace that other call. Fast now!"

Seconds, precious seconds, ticked by while I waited. Sweat poured down my face like melted butter. Finally, after what seemed an indeterminable time, operator said:

"The call is from 827 Runyun Street. Phone listed to—"

"Never mind that," I clipped. "Cut me in now."

A click sounded in my receiver. I heard an anxious voice saying: "Be a brave girl, Dolce, I'll—"

I heard enough to know Darnell and Globat had put my murder frame into operation so far without a hitch. I had guessed right. Gordon Fowler was talking to his daughter.

I broke into his sentence with a hoarse: "Keep your head, Fowler. And listen—" I pumped out words with the rapidity of a machine gun. "It's a matter of life and death! This is Dallas Bradfield speaking—the private detective. Darnell is behind your daughter's kidnaping. He plans to use it as a club over you to alibi his murder of Zachary Cavitt—"

I got no further. Fowler gasped, "What? What?" and he started to jiggle his hook up and down. "Operator! Operator!" he shouted. "You cut me off!"

FOR all his reputed acumen, the lawyer hadn't kept his head. And his losing it cost Zachary Cavitt his life. Even as I tried to shout instructions to Fowler, a shriek of horror knifed through my eardrums. A terrified shriek that was drowned out by the thundering crack of a gun.

Then the wire went dead.

I slammed down the receiver with a hollow groan. As I sprinted out of the apartment I tried to tell myself I had done my best. That Cavitt's death wouldn't be on my conscience. That if it hadn't been for Fowler's dumbness. . . .

But no dice. I knew as long as I lived the crazy millionaire's ghost would haunt me. All I could do now was see to it that Darnell got what was coming to him. He would be with Fowler laying down the law to him.

An automatic elevator spilled me in a swanky lobby. I tore out, followed by the awed, bewildered gazes of two pages and the switchboard operator. No wonder. I must have presented a gruesome sight.

On the street I got my bearings. Madison and Sixty-seventh. I remembered Cavitt's mansion was on Fifth and Sixty-seventh. I lit out West with pounding heels, made the few blocks in ten seconds flat.

The broad façade of Cavitt's imposing stone pile showed lights on the first floor, left of the entrance. I flew up stone stairs, vaulted a stone balustrade to a narrow balcony. Drawn blinds cut off my view of the interior. I booted the doors of a French-window wide. Oblivious to flying glass, I plunged into a high-ceilinged library.

And stopped dead in my tracks.

Stanley Darnell lay prone on the floor, his face the color of chalk, his eyes glacial with fear. An elderly man, gaunt, with hollow cheeks, silky white hair, cavernous eyes that burned, sat on Darnell's chest.

The white haired man was Zachary Cavitt!

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His left sleeve was blotched with blood. In his right hand he held a gun. Its muzzle was pressed against Darnell's head.

Upon my precipitous entrance, Cavitt, startled, jerked the gun up.

Things began to happen.

Darnell squirmed clear of Cavitt, snatched the gun, sent his uncle whirling across the room with a stunning blow to the chin. He whipped around toward me, his peaked face a bloodless mask of desperation. I hurled myself at him in a flying tackle.

The gun belched flame, singeing my hair. I caught him around the midsection. We crashed to the floor, a tangle of flailing arms and legs. The gun thudded yards away on the rug.

Panting, drooling curses, Darnell wriggled out of my grasp, made his feet. I ducked a savage kick aimed at my head, lurched erect. My left smacked his eye, closing it. My right landed on his chin with crack that must have echoed in the Bowery. He went down.

All my fury, fermenting for hours, coagulated in a sudden lust to kill.

I heaved him upright by his collar. "You handed out plenty, rat," I snarled. "Let's see if you can take it!" I raked his face, that would never again be handsome, with murderous blows.

A hoarse cry behind me brought back sanity. I dropped Darnell, turned. A middle-aged man, whom I recognized as Gordon Fowler, was rushing into the room. Zachary Cavitt was supporting himself on the arm of a chair, eyes gleaming.

"Keep right on, whoever you are," he chuckled ghoulishly. "You're doin' swell!"

I looked at Gordon Fowler. "I'm Dallas Bradfield," I told him. "I spoke to you a short time ago. What in blazes happened here? I thought—"

"I've read about you, Mr. Bradfield," the lawyer said. "When you broke in so unexpectedly on my conversation with my daughter and warned me about Darnell, he was standing beside me. Afraid he could hear you, I tried to cover you up. I saw him draw a gun, aim it at Mr. Cavitt. I screamed. My yell startled him, I guess, spoiled his aim, for his shot struck Mr. Cavitt in the arm. Having no other weapon, I tore the phone loose and knocked him unconscious with it. I've been in the reception hall, phoning the police."

His pale lips trembled. "I don't know how you learned about Darnell's dastardly plot—perhaps—perhaps you know where he has my daughter?"

"Call the police again. Tell them to raid 827 Runyun Street. Your daughter's imprisoned there."

Fowler exclaimed excitedly, started for the door.

"Be sure to tell the cops," I yelled after him, "not to let a guy by the name of Pete Globat escape. He was in this thing with Darnell."

Zachary Cavitt beamed on me. "Young man," he said, "name your own reward. It seems I owe you my life. But for your timely call I would now be dead. How did you know Stanley was plotting my murder?"

I thought it best not to wise him to the fact that he'd almost owed me his death. And I also decided not to point out if he weren't such a crazy coot he wouldn't have been in danger in the first place.

I said: "You owe your life to the fact that all criminals make a mistake. Darnell was no exception. His mistake was in not killing me when he had the chance."

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Civil Service Q & A

By "G-2"

Could You Qualify as—

Police Patrolman	Special Agent (G-Man)
Police Detective	Secret Service Operative
Policewoman	Post Office Inspector
Fingerprint Expert	Customs Patrol
State Trooper	Immigration Patrol
Crime Prevention Investigator	Anti-Narcotic Agent
Probation Officer	Parole Investigator
Criminologist	Prison Keeper
Police Radio Expert	Internal Revenue Agent
	Alcohol Tax Agent

This department will give you every week typical questions asked in civil service examinations.

Prison Guard Test (Continued)

SECTION II—*Mental Alertness.* (This section consists of 10 short answer questions with 10 credits allowed for each correct answer. Ring with a pencil the letter you choose as your answer.)

Q 1—"The prevention of escapes in a penal institution is chiefly a matter of keen observation with particular attention to the suspicious conduct of an inmate or a group of inmates. When a prisoner knows he is being closely observed he will carefully consider the many hazards involved, and thinking of this risk, usually he changes his mind." This statement means most nearly, (a) a prisoner contemplating escape will confess his plan when he knows he is suspected; (b) a prisoner who knows that his guards are watchful and trained to detect suspicious conduct on the part of prisoners realizes the great risk in escape; (c) a guard who cultivates a deep friendship with prisoners can always prevent an escape.

Q 2—"It is not wise to permit habitual criminals to associate with youthful first or second offenders. The prisoner who has shown no indication of reforming after numerous jail terms usually considers that a career of crime pays, and since he is of lawless nature, he tries to convince youthful offenders that a life of crime is the easiest way of getting on, and that it is also a life of thrills." This statement means most nearly, (a) all young prisoners can be reformed; (b) an older prisoner is always lawless; (c) segregation of first and second offenders from repeaters is a desirable practice in prisons.

Q 3—"Fresh air and the opportunity to enjoy nature are essential to normal health. Recreation is vital to adults and minors, and this is so even in prisons. One of the most essential requirements in city life are playgrounds and parks. The streets do not give the proper opportunity for play and recreation. Trees and shrubbery furnish human beings in a city with their only contact with nature. As a means to prevent crime, parks and playgrounds are of the utmost importance." This statement means most nearly, (a) prisoners in confinement must be allowed to enjoy trees; (b) crime is prevented in prisons by having adequate playgrounds; (c) lack of recreation and contact with nature is detrimental to good health and social betterment in cities.

Q 4—The warden of a prison says to you, "Be firm at all times with the inmates in your charge. Do not tolerate the slight-

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est infraction of discipline rules. Show your prisoners that you are always master of the situation. Respect and fear are qualities you must command from prisoners." The warden means (a) harsh treatment is always necessary in dealing with prisoners; (b) show your mastery over prisoners by constantly reminding them that they are outcasts; (c) by being firm and commanding respect and fear a prison guard indicates that he has control over inmates.

Q 5—COMPASS is to direction as THERMOMETER is to (a) water; (b) mercury; (c) temperature; (d) heat; (e) cold. (Select only one answer.)

Q 6—A prison guard should shoot to kill when (a) an inmate refuses to obey a command; (b) an inmate drops his tools and strikes; (c) an inmate flashes a knife and makes a lunge at another keeper; (d) an inmate is caught stealing from the prison commissary; (e) an inmate swears at you.

Q 7—MOLLIFY means most nearly (a) coax; (b) strengthen; (c) please; (d) correct; (e) appease.

Q 8—APPREHEND means most nearly (a) suspect; (b) avoid; (c) capture; (d) chase; (e) convict.

Q 9—The "honor system" in prisons consists of (a) rewarding guards for brave acts; (b) giving better treatment to educated prisoners; (c) giving inmates who have proved they can be trusted, and who behave well, an opportunity to work and have their recreation without a guard over them.

Q 10—Corporal punishment means most nearly (a) punishment inflicted by a guard who has the rank of a corporal; (b) beating; (c) confinement in a dark cell.

SECTION III—*Civil Government.* (10 credits for each correct answer.)

Q 1—The presiding officer of the U. S. Senate is (a) the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; (b) Speaker of the Senate; (c) Vice President of the United States; (d) the majority leader.

Q 2—The U. S. Department of Justice is in charge of (a) J. Edgar Hoover; (b) the Attorney General of the U. S.; (c) the U. S. Supreme Court; (d) the Solicitor General of the U. S.

Q 3—The Congress of the United States is (a) the national legislative body; (b) the executive branch; (c) the law-enforcing agency of the Federal government; (d) judicial branch of the government.

Q 4—The Constitution of the United States was adopted (a) during the Revolutionary War; (b) at the close of the Civil War; (c) July 4, 1775; (d) September 17, 1787.

Q 5—Persons eligible for election to the U. S. House of Representatives must be (a) over 21; (b) 25 years or over; (c) 36 years or over; (d) residents of the United States for at least 5 years.

Q 6—The power to protect the rights of persons and property in the public interest is legally known as the (a) injunction power; (b) police power; (c) right of eminent domain; (d) judicial power.

Q 7—The vote required in Congress to declare war is (a) a majority vote; (b) unanimous; (c) joint; (d) party vote.

Q 8—Congress meets in regular session (a) at the call of the President; (b) annually on the third day in January; (c) when the Speaker of the House issues the call; (d) after each state legislature has met.

Q 9—All judges of Federal courts are (a) elected; (b) appointed; (c) promoted from state courts; (d) elected by political party conventions.

Q 10—Federal prisons are operated by (a) the U. S. Supreme Court; (b) the U. S. Department of Justice; (c) the welfare division of the U. S. Department of Labor; (d) the U. S. Crime Commission.

SECTION IV—*Spelling.* (10 points for each correct answer.) One word is misspelled in each sentence below. Pick out the word and spell it correctly in the space provided.

Q 1—The warden recomended a pardon. .....

Q 2—Kidnaping is an hienous crime. .....

Q 3—The prisoners did not have suficient food. .....

Q 4—He critisized the work. .....

Q 5—A carrer of crime never pays. .....

Q 6—The officer was intoxacated. .....

Q 7—Every man hopes for advancement. .....

Q 8—He had been given every oppurtunity. .....

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Q 9—The doctor treated him for tyfoid fever. .....

Q 10—Miners are usually sent to a reformatory. .....

Key answers to the above Q's are printed below. The remaining sections of the test covering duties and clerical work will appear next week.

A "TOUGH" CLERK TEST

Apparently there is great need for clerks in state departments, for many readers request sample test questions to prepare themselves for coming examinations or to determine whether or not their answers to tests already taken were correct. The work of administering relief, old age security and unemployment assistance has made necessary the appointment of many additional clerks throughout the country.

Several readers in different states report difficulty in correctly or fully answering two questions which seem to have crept into more than one test for clerk. One question: Name seven methods or devices for duplicating in common use in offices. Many candidates could think of five only. In a recent New York test the key answer to this question was: (1) photostat; (2) letter press copying; (3) copying machine; (4) gelatine process; (5) mimeograph; (6) Hooven automatic typewriter; (7) carbon paper. Candidates usually miss on the commonest duplicators, carbons and photostats. Another troublesome question was, name seven different types of filing systems recognized as standard. The answer, (1) subject; (2) alphabetical; (3) decimal; (4) cross file; (5) geographic; (6) numerical; (7) variable index. There may be others, also variations of those listed, but seven was all the questions required.

STATE CLERK TEST

A reader preparing to take a test for assistant clerk in a state office asks for ten typical questions in a clerk test which would apply to any clerical job. Ten questions often repeated in different form are:

Q 1—A privilege granted to persons, corporations or companies by a government in conformity with certain specified conditions is called a .....

Q 2—When a legal claim for an unpaid debt is laid against property it is called a .....

Q 3—In the body of a telegram "San Francisco" counts as how many words?

Q 4—Is it true or false that the chief purpose of accounting in government is to ascertain profit and loss?

Q 5—Bank discount means a deduction made by a bank for purchasing a note before it is .....

Q 6—A mayor is an officer of (a) county; (b) state; (c) municipality.

Q 7—The indorser of a check usually signs his name on the ..... of the check.

Q 8—First-class mail is matter that is (a) hand-written; (b) typewritten; (c) in an envelope; (d) sealed against inspection.

Q 9—Is it true or false that telegraph companies count "parcel post" as one word?

Q 10—The card which is placed before a section in a file and labeled to indicate what is contained in that section is called a .....

Key answers are given below.

ABBREVIATIONS

Another source of trouble in clerk tests, and mental tests for stenographers and typists, are abbreviations. It appears from an examination of test papers that few civil service examiners fail to include them. Among the favorites are the following:

Q 1—Give the meaning of (a) ad lib.; (b) A. D.; (c) anon.; (d) et seq.; (e) R. F. D.; (f) F. O. B.; (g) pro tem.; (h) et al.; (i) i. e.; (j) vs.; (k) viz.; (l) cwt.; (m) C. O. D.; (n) Ms.; (o) A. W. O. L.; (p) C. P. A. Answers will be found below.

KEY ANSWERS

Prison guard test. Section II—Q 1—(b); Q 2—(c); Q 3—(c); Q 4—(c); Q 5 (c); Q 6—(c); Q 7—(e); Q 8—(c); Q 9—(c); Q 10—(b). Section III—Q 1—(c); Q 2—(b); Q 3—(a); Q 4—(d); Q 5—(b); Q 6—(b); Q 7—(a); Q 8—(b); Q 9—(b); Q 10—(b). Section IV—Q 1—recommended; Q 2—heinous; Q 3—sufficient; Q 4—criticized; Q 5—career; Q 6—intoxicated; Q 7—advancement; Q 8—opportunity; Q 9—typhoid; Q 10—minors.

State Clerk test: Q 1—franchise; Q 2—lien; Q 3—one word; Q 4—false (a government is not run for financial profit); Q 5—due; Q 6—municipality; Q 7—back; Q 8—(d); Q 9—false. (It is not hyphenated); Q 10—tab or guide.

(*Continued on Page 143*)

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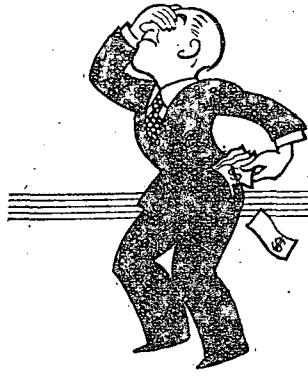

Picking Your Own Pocket

Skip Tracers
By
Frank Wrentmore

This is the fifty-fifth of a series of articles exposing business rackets that cost you billions of dollars every year! Mr. Wrentmore is an authority on swindles and frauds, well known to legal, financial and commercial associations.—The Editor.

ANY person who tries to beat the financing or installment houses today is virtually "Picking His Own Pockets." It is true, you may be able to get away for a while in one or two instances, but sooner or later your creditors are almost sure to catch up with you and frequently at a time when it will prove most embarrassing.

For a number of years the credit houses were at a decided disadvantage and consequently swallowed some heavy credit losses, but today the shoe is on the other foot. In practically every large city there is a constant interchange of credit information and a centralization of facts regarding individuals who purchase any kind of merchandise on installments. One of the greatest improvements designed to outwit the credit beat is a filing system which automatically locates an individual who has used a variety of names in making his or her purchases at different stores. To reveal how this is accomplished would not be fair, but you may accept my statement that it is so.

Some of the methods employed in locating "skips" are not only interesting, but ingenious. Suppose, after having exhausted your credit in Detroit, you move to New York City. Here, you think, you are safe from your creditors. You are, for a while. But one day you receive a letter from a firm in San Francisco whose letterhead is as follows:

NATIONAL INHERITANCE SERVICE
Estate Counsellors
Missing Heirs Located
26 O'Farrell St.,
San Francisco, Calif.

Their letter, in part, reads:

DEAR MR. BLANK:

We have been endeavoring to communicate with a person of your name and our investigations now lead us to believe that you are the interested party.

This is a matter of distinct importance to you if you are the individual in question and that we may make certain that you are the one, please answer the following questions:

Then follows a list of questions which identifies you most definitely. Then the company says:

If the above information checks with the records, you will be communicated

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with by return mail. Use envelope enclosed for reply. Very truly yours,
NATIONAL INHERITANCE SERVICE.

Now the chances are ten to one that you will not connect this San Francisco firm with your Detroit adventures, but you must remember that information which is sufficient to identify a "missing heir" will also identify a missing debtor, so if you prove to be the individual they are seeking—and you have given them that proof—you will soon learn how small the world really is. The National Inheritance Service are one of several firms who operate nationally as "skip tracers."

ANOTHER firm, which had their headquarters in New York City, employed one of the cruelest devices I have ever seen. Their letterhead was seemingly that of a hospital, and the letter—signed by a "Doctor"—stated, in effect, that one of their patients desired to locate an individual of your name. It doesn't require much of an imagination to see what effect this kind of a letter would have on a mother whose son or daughter was missing. The Post Office Department took some steps in that matter.

Once located, the debtor is harassed and every effort is made to make him pay. A judgment or garnishee may be filed with his employer against the debtor's salary and some large corporations, for their own protection, have adopted the policy of immediately discharging employees whose wages have been garnisheed.

Some firms, in investigating applications for employment, check with the credit reporting agencies before a man is hired. If his credit record is bad, he doesn't go on the pay roll.

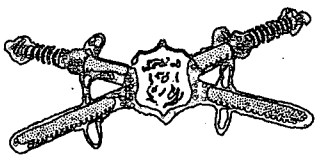
Credit records sometimes travel long distances both in point of time and space. Some years ago a newly established jewelry credit house, in order to open a number of accounts quickly, took some long chances. They extended credit to many minors for school rings and other pieces of inexpensive jewelry.

Some of these minors took advantage of the law and refused to pay for their purchases. Time marched on and years later when some of these former school boys and girls married and set out to buy their household furniture from other credit houses they learned, much to their surprise, that they would have to pay for their earlier purchases before their credit could be re-established. They paid.

Selling or pawning articles purchased on time, without paying for them, is larceny. Don't try that.

This article isn't written as a lecture on morals, but merely to prove to you that your chances of beating the credit game today are mighty slim. No matter where you go, they'll get you.

Next Week—Fortune Tellers



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Solving Cipher Secrets

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first cryptogram each week is the easiest.

M. E. OHAVER
"Sunyam"

OUR *Cipher Correspondence Club,* including the five new members herewith, now numbers ninety members! Clip the following list and those to follow, so that your Club Directory will be complete and up-to-date. There are no dues nor special requirements for membership in this Club. Its purpose is to contact you with others interested in cryptograms. So if you are not already a member, just send us your name and address for free publication. While you are at it, write to these new members! Here they are:

CIPHER CORRESPONDENCE CLUB

(Continued from Sept. 19, 1936)

AJAX, A. J. Case, 312 Sixth Street S.E., Staples, Minn.

THE RED DUKE, Emmett C. Pell, 626 Trinity Ave., New York, N. Y.

G. A. SLIGHT, John Hannan, 26 Fullerton Ave., Newburgh, N. Y.

DICK TATE, Mrs. Helen Wolcott, 1470 N. Division St., Battle Creek, Mich.

Miss Hannah Epstein, 8121 Twentieth Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

(To Be Continued)

AJAX, first in this week's list, writes: "I was born Jan. 30, 1864, so you can see I'm no spring chicken!" And G. A. SLIGHT, also listed above, would like especially to hear from other "bugs" in his neighborhood! *Cipher Correspondence Club* members are requested to report promptly all changes of address. Please note: ZARKOV, L. A. Chapin, *former address,* 615 Congress Street South, Aberdeen, S. Dak.; *new address,* Aberdeen, S. Dak.

In last week's Inner Circle cipher, Don Ricardo's No. 252, the heavy antepenultimate use (5 times) of symbol K suggested *i,* with the ending -KDM (frequencies 11-6-3) thus responding as *-ing.* Whereupon groups 2 and 3, by comparison, and duly noting *-gic* as likely for the ending -MPK, could be developed into *tragic actor;* and so on. The high frequency of the letter *c,* used 22 times, was a noteworthy peculiarity in this cryptogram!

Archie Germain's division puzzle, using a 10-letter key phrase (numbered *012345 6789*), opens the current cryptograms. F — F = F can only mean one thing! And that will lead to D in F — D = D. In Jos. M. Crosby's contribution, note the pattern of XPPFPQ in connection with the one-letter word X. Continue with QEFP, QL, and PLJB. Then try for the last word.

Zadig provides the 4-letter pattern HOZH for comparison with HOT. Follow up with the phrase OZFT YTTU, noting YT. And so to KHZHTV; TFTLBEUT and UE; etc. The two phrases BU NRPH BU and DBP PFYFT CF should help you with the next crypt, by Millexes, providing most of the letters for UXDDFUUGXN and NLDFPUF.

Ciphermit's message relates a personal experience! "The puzzle exaggerates things a bit," he explains. "The inquisitive GATLQLY made only six KNMLH, by actual count!" Can you guess *HDAHH? A solution of S. T. D.'s Inner Circle cipher and the answers to all of this week's ciphers will appear next week. The asterisks are prefixed to capitalized words.

No. 253—Cryptic Division. By Archie Germain.

```
TR)ETFAD(DTP
  EOF
  ---
   AFA
   PDP
  ---
   DOD
   EHR
  ---
    RK
```


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No. 254—Good Sportsmanship. By Jos M. Crosby.

"OBPMBZQ LRO DXJB IXTP. ALK'Q YB X DXJB ELD. XPP-FPQ RP FK HBBMFKD QEFP X DLLA MIXZB QL ERKQ LO CFPE. VLR JXV TFPE QL ZLJB YXZH PLJB AXV."—*KBY-OXPHX *DXJB *ZLJJFPPFLK.

No. 255—Tiny Lines. By Zadig.

NH XZUUEH YT VTRNUNHTAB KHZHTV HOZH UE HDE STLKEUK OZFT RNUPTLSLNUHK ZANJT GUHNA HOT RN-UPTLSLNUHK ER TFTLBEUT NU HOT DELAV OZFT YTTU TCOZGKHNFTAB XEQSZLTV REL XENUXNVTUXT.

No. 256—Taking a Chance. By Millexes.

ETLFYU BHBLPUV HBOCNLPH DBP PFYFT CF ZKRNNA UXDDFUUGXN BU NRPH BU OBTTLBHF NLDFPUF CXTF-BXU BTF BNNRZFE VR RSFTBVF ZLEF RSFP!

No. 257—A Hot Time. By Ciphermit.

ETXRSNGBY FAHENZLTH KNQL NY GATL! "EMBYU, EM-BYU!" GATLQLY BTTAZL, NRLY DAYFNDH DASK BO, HVPATS DBSLT, EKNR KNMLH SAMM KNPHL MNNIH MA-IL *HDAHH EKLLHL!

No. 258—Moral Effect. By S. T. D.

KASK HRTKH ZAXPSK; OFMRW JRXGSMRNOH SV NOLS-HG KFWA OFMA; XSSO VSNLC HGARKH AKYRHRSKAW RKYRGA—ZFG KAE XMCJGH "USOW"!

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

247— Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
P N E U M A T I C S

248—President Roosevelt may be re-elected, but he won't serve eight full years. The new inaugural date is in January, so his present term is three years, ten months long.

249—Quassia, produced from the South American quassia tree, was named after the Surinam Negro, Quassi, who discovered the medicinal qualities of the drug.

250—Given proper clews, comedy detectives in fiction fables densely follow senseless trails, consistently overlooking best bets.

251—Smart dip slyly lifts watch from alert copper's watch-pocket. Pickpocket caught; receives thirty days. Ticker retrieved!

252—Uncouth tragic actor, clutching vacuous cranium, declaims sickly claptrap. Churlish spectators object, clamor, chuck cabbage. Panicky mimic, stricken, cedes proscenium.

Readers sending us answers to any of this week's cipher puzzles will be duly credited in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for October. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

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FLASHES from READERS

IT is a genuine pleasure for the editorial staff to learn from some of our correspondents just how long many of them have been keen and steady readers of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY. And it is interesting to discover how they were first introduced to this magazine.

A gentleman from Indiana writes us:

DEAR EDITOR:

I started listening to my mother read DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY to my father when I was too young to read it myself. I am forty-three years old now and I have read your weekly for more years than I care to count. (But don't take me too seriously!)

In looking back over the years, I have often tried to pick out the story that seemed to me to be "tops," but I find that difficult to do, for I find most of the yarns you print are of high caliber.

But I do want to say that I always look forward to the stories of Cornell Woolrich, Max Brand, Frederick Painton and Judson Philips whenever I notice that they are announced for coming issues. So you see, to pick *one* of the yarns as the best—well, that is impossible.

PENROD T. FIELD,
Muncie, Indiana.

He walks more than a mile for his copy:

DEAR EDITOR:

There is probably nothing now in my life that gives me more pleasure than your publication. Through storm and sunshine in all the years, I have turned to DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

At present I am living but an hour's travel out of New York City, yet I find it rather hard to get your magazine because I am carving a little home for my old age out of the scrub-oak section of Long Island. I have no car, and to get to the nearest news-stand I walk three miles each way. I would not walk a fifth of that distance for a pack of cigarettes—but DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY is different!

Certain characters stand out in my mind as old friends. Sometimes I might be puzzled to remember their creators, but the men and women of your fiction *live*. It is with actual delight that I turn to the adventures of the *Park Avenue Hunt Club, Daffy Dill, Paul C. Pitt* and those two pals, *Riordan* and *Halloran*. All others must wait their turn.

ROBERT H. QUINCY,
Central Islip, N. Y.

How this man began to read DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY:

DEAR EDITOR:

I have been a steady and consistent reader of your weekly for nearly seven years, and I got hold of my first copy by accident. I picked up an old torn issue from the seat of a subway car, I being at the time employed as a trainman (and I still am). It was badly torn, but on looking it over I started to become very much engrossed in it. When I came to a page that was torn out, I waited until I was through with my run, then I went to the first news-stand and bought a new copy. Since then I have never missed a copy.

BROOKS SHAW SALTONSTALL,
Boston, Mass.

Made him sit up:

DEAR EDITOR:

If memory serves right, I have been reading your magazine for about ten years. In those

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days it was known as FLYNN'S. I have enjoyed my copies in many different countries, too, having been in the United States Marine Corps. I can say, therefore, that I have read it "from the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli."

This is my first attempt at writing to anyone unsolicited, but I simply have to say that although your publication has always been a splendid one, when the *Park Avenue Hunt Club* started performing, I sat up and took notice; because if there ever was an all-absorbing, breath-taking serial Judson Philips' is it. I believe I was among his earliest readers and they were good, but this later series with their gripping episodes are—pshaw! what's the use of trying to describe them. I am no professional writer, anyway. So let me warn you! Don't ever lose Philips—or you will lose a steady customer.

LEW D. TAYLOR,
New York City.

Now the British readers have taken up the serial-short story contention!

DEAR EDITOR:

I know you receive many letters from many places and written in many moods, some with advice, some (a few) contain remarks not becoming any but mad readers.

I can safely say, I believe that it is the best magazine coming from America. Many that are published I cannot see what it is that keeps them in circulation.

I have one in front of me now containing letters written about serials. Now *don't* put any more in than two.

Keep as you are, as your DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY stands out above every other, as it is one alone having no impossible character, traveling about the world with a wardrobe of disguises, and a tribe of special agents and the like, I guess what I mean is clear to you.

Yours till the next issue and many more to come,
H. J. POWELL,
Birmingham, England.

Civil Service Q & A

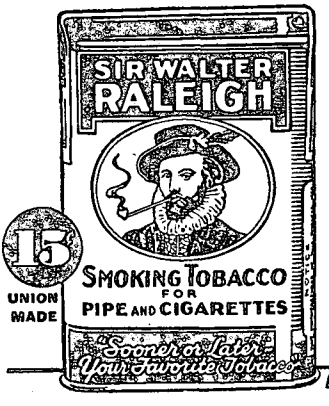
(*Continued from Page 137*)

Abbreviations: (a) at pleasure; (b) Anno domini—in the year of our Lord; (c) anonymous; (d) and the following; (e) Rural Free Delivery; (f) free on board; (g) for the time being; (h) and others; (i) that is; (j) versus (against); (k) to wit, namely; (l) hundred weight; (m) collect on delivery; (n) manuscript; (o) absent without leave; (p) Certified Public Accountant.

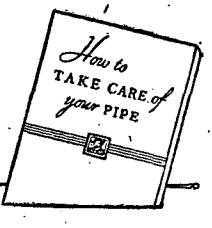
Next Week—Prison Guard Test
(Concluded)

TWO PUFFS from that soggy pipe full of fire-water tobacco and another redskin bit the dust. We tell travelers as well as stay-at-homes that the true pipe of peace should be regularly cleaned, and packed with nothing but inoffensive Sir Walter Raleigh Smoking Tobacco. It's a secret blend of definitely milder Kentucky Burley leaf. Burns slow, pacifies the tenderest tongue and spreads a most delightful and winning fragrance. We're so blamed proud of Sir Walter Raleigh we wrap it in heavy gold foil for extra freshness. Ever treated yourself to a tin? Only 15¢.

SWITCH TO THE BRAND OF GRAND AROMA



FREE booklet tells how to make your old pipe taste better, sweeter; how to break in a new pipe. Write for copy today. Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corporation, Louisville, Kentucky. Dept. MS-616



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COMING NEXT WEEK!

DOUBLE TROUBLE

A High-Speed Adventure with Daffy Dill

By Richard Sale

DAFFY'S boss claimed that a dead undertaker is news. *Dinah* added that one death can lead to another. *Daffy Dill* pooh-poohed both of them—until a single murder had multiplied to three, and a lead-slinging madman threatened to tack *Daffy's* hide on the fence in the process of doubling the score!

THE LADY IN THE GRAVE

A Gripping Novelette by

John K. Butler

HERS was a living death! *Irene Chadwick* willingly lay buried alive under five tons of earth. And it was no easy job for *Private Investigator Mike* to figure out the multitude of mysterious reasons why she was entombed.

TO LIVE HER OWN LIFE

An Amazing True Story by

John Kobler

TO this very day, *Violette Nozière* is shunned by her fellow-prisoners because they regard her as the vilest woman criminal in all France.

Also Stories by:

D. B. McCANDLESS -:- MAX BRAND -:- CONVICT 12627

Plus the usual DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY features by FRANK WRENTMORE, "G-2," STOOKIE ALLEN and M. E. OHAVER.

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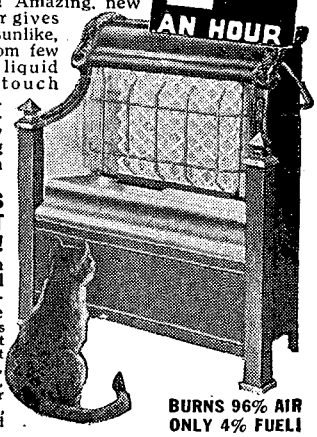

REPLACES STOVES...COST LESS TO USE!

Why fuss with dirty stoves, coal or wood, tangling cord or tube heaters when this beautiful Radiant gives you more heat for less money, needs no bulky fuel, leaves no dirt or ashes, is portable, and can be used anywhere.

BURNS 96% AIR ONLY 4% FUEL!

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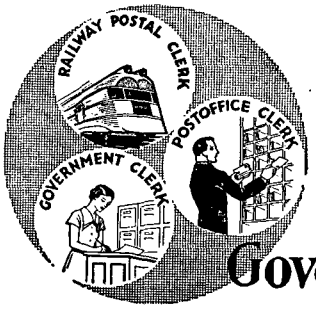

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Name .....

Address .....

This Revelation Will Startle MEN PAST 40!

But It May Bring Years of Comfort to Their Lives!

HAVE you lost much of your strength? Do you suffer from pains in back and elsewhere? Are you forced to get up 2 to 10 times at night? Are you a victim of nervousness, fatigue, dizziness, chronic constipation, sciatica, so-called bladder weakness? Many men past 40 often mistake these ailments for symptoms of approaching old age. They undergo prolonged treatments that frequently bring no relief, because they have failed to strike at the real trouble.

Science has found that these ailments in men past 40 are often due to prostate Gland congestion or enlargement. This tiny gland becomes swollen and fails to function. Unless corrected it will likely grow worse. The result is often wretched old age or perhaps grave surgery.

What This Treatment Really Means

Science has now perfected an amazing home treatment, used and endorsed by physicians and sanitariums. It goes directly to the area of the prostate gland, relieving congestion, increasing circulation, toning and stimulating. Many users report relief almost over night. Others say they actually felt 10 years younger in 7 days. Not a drug—medicine—massage—diet—violet ray—or exercise. It is a natural method.

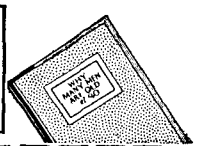
100,000 Men Have Found the Answer

They have been shown the secret of better health and strength in keeping this tiny vital prostate gland active at the period in many men's lives when it becomes congested or inflamed.

FREE If You Act Now!

The results of this new method are so startling that the manufacturer will let you test it on 7 days' Free Trial. If it doesn't bring immediate relief—if it doesn't make you feel 10 years younger in 7 days—it will cost you nothing. Mail the coupon for details and Free copy of "Why Many Men Are Old at 40."

If you live west of the Rockies, address The Electro Thermal Co., 500 Wm. Fox Building, Dept. 30-P, Los Angeles, Calif. In Canada, address the Electro Thermal Co., Desk 30-P, 53 Yonge St., Toronto, Canada.



W. J. KIRK, President,
The Electro Thermal Co.,
3007 Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio.

Send details of Free Trial and Free Copy of "Why Many Men Are Old at 40." No cost or obligation.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

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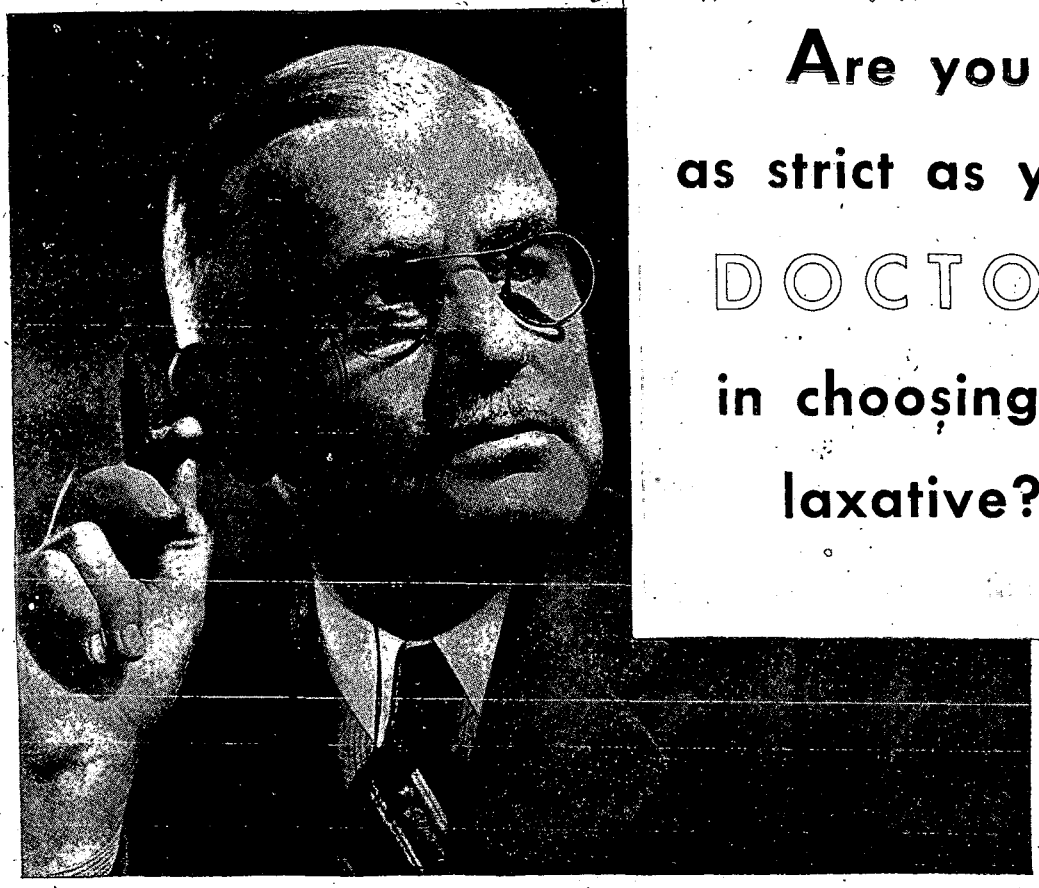

Are you as strict as your DOCTOR in choosing a laxative?

TODAY, the doctor studies "Prevention" as closely as anything in his profession. He tries to guard his patients from even a single error which may in any way affect their health.

Before approving a laxative, for instance, he sets up a strict standard of requirements which must be fully met. This code is printed below, point by point. And *every* point is important.

WHAT DOCTORS DEMAND OF A LAXATIVE:

It should be dependable.
It should be mild and gentle.
It should be thorough.
Its merit should be proven by the test of time.
It should *not* form a habit.
It should *not* over-act.
It should *not* cause stomach pains.
It should *not* nauseate, or upset the digestion.

EX-LAX CHECKS ON EVERY POINT

You need not memorize the list above. But remember this one fact: Ex-Lax checks on *every* point the doctor looks for. Many physicians use Ex-Lax in their own homes. For over 30 years, mothers have given it to their children with perfect trust. Since Ex-Lax was first introduced, many laxatives have come and gone. Yet Ex-Lax remains the outstanding leader. It is the largest-selling laxative in the whole world.

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Try Ex-Lax the next time you need a laxative and see how accurately it meets the doctor's requirements. It *is* gentle. It *is* thorough. It is *not* upsetting. Not nauseating. Not habit-forming—you don't have to continue increasing the dose to get results.

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